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

**1 SAMUEL-018. THE SECRET OF COURAGE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God."*

*1 Samuel 30:6*

David was at perhaps the very lowest ebb of his fortunes. He had long been a wandering outlaw, and had finally been driven, by Saul's persistent hostility, to take refuge in the Philistines country. He had gathered around himself a band of desperate men, and was living very much like a freebooter. He had found refuge in a little city of the Philistines, far down in the South, from which he and his men had marched as a contingent in the Philistine army, which was preparing an attack upon Saul. But, naturally, the Philistine soldiers doubted their ally, and he was obliged to take himself and his troops back again to their temporary home.

When he came there it was a heap of smoking ruins. Everything was gone; property, cattle, wives, children--and all was desolation. His turbulent followers rose against him, a mutiny broke out--a dangerous thing amongst such a crew--and they were ready to stone him. And at that moment what did he do? Nothing. Was he cast down? No. Was he agitated? No. But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.

Now the first thing I notice is

**I. The grand assurance which this man gripped fast at such a time.**

It is not by accident, nor is it a mere piece of tautology, that we read the Lord his God. For, if you will remember, the very keynote of the psalms which are ascribed to David is just that expression, My God, My God. So far as the very fragmentary records of Jewish literature go, it would appear as if David was the very first of all the ancient singers to grapple that thought that he stood in a personal, individual relation to God, and God to him. And so it was his God that he laid hold of at that dark hour.

Now I am not putting too much into a little word when I insist upon it that the very essence and nerve of what strengthened David, at that supreme moment of desolation, was the conviction that welled up in his heart that, in spite of it all, he had a grip of God's hand as his very own, and God had hold of him. Just think of the difference between the attitude of mind and heart expressed in the names that were more familiar to the Israelitish people, and this name for Jehovah. The God of Israel--that is wide, general; and a man might use it and yet fail to feel that it implied that each individual of the community stood by himself in a personal relation to God. But David penetrated through the broad, general thought, and got into the heart of the matter. It was not enough for him, in his time of need, to stay himself upon a vague universal goodness, but he had to clasp to his burdened heart the individualising thought, the God of Israel is my God.

Think, too, of the contrast of the thoughts and emotions suggested by My God, and by the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. Great as that name is, it carries the mind away back into the past, and speaks of a historical relation in former days, which may or may not continue in all its tenderness and sweetness and power into the prosaic present. But when a man feels, not only the God of Jacob is our Refuge, but, the God of Jacob is my God, then the whole thing flashes up into new power. My sun--will one man claim property in that great luminary that pours its light down on the whole world? Yes.

The sun whose beams most glorious are,

Disdaineth no beholder,

as the old song has it. Each man's eye receives the straight impact of its universal beams. It is my sun, though it be the light that lightens all men that come into the world. My atmosphere--will one man claim the free, unappropriated winds of heaven as his? Yes, for they will pour into his lungs; and yet his brother will be none the poorer.

I would not go the length of saying that the living realisation, in heart and mind, of this personal possession of God is the difference between a traditional and vague profession of religion and a vital possession of religion, but if it is not the difference, it goes a long way towards explaining the difference. The man who contents himself with the generality of a Gospel for the world, and who can say no more than that Jesus Christ died for all, has yet to learn the most intimate sweetness, and the most quickening and transforming power, of that Gospel, and he only learns it when he says, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.

So do not let us be content with saying, the God of Israel, and its many thousands, or the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, who filled the past with His lustre, but let us bring the general good into our own houses, as men might draw the waters of Niagara into their homes through pipes, and let us cry: My Lord and my God! David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.

**II. Now note, secondly, the sufficiency of this one conviction and assurance.**

Here is one of the many eloquent buts of the Bible. On the one hand is piled up a black heap of calamities, loss, treachery and peril; and opposed to them is only that one clause: But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God. There was only one possession in all the world, except his body and the clothes that he stood in, that he could call his own at that moment. Everything else was gone; his property was carried off by raiders, his home was smouldering embers. But the Amalekites had not stolen God from him. Though he could no longer say, My house, my city, my possessions, he could say, My God. Whatever else we lose, as long as we have Him we are rich; and whatever else we possess, we are poor as long as we have not Him. God is enough; whatever else may go. The Lord his God was the sufficient portion for this man when he stood a homeless pauper. He had lost everything that his heart clung to; wives, children; Abigail and Abinoam were captives in the arms of some Amalekites; his house was left to him desolate; his heart was bleeding. But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God and the bleeding heart was stanched, and the yearning for some one to love and be loved by was satisfied, when he turned himself from the desolation of earth to the riches in the heavens. He was standing on the edge of possible death, for his followers were ready to stone him. He had come through many perils in the past, but he had never been nearer a fatal end than he was at that moment. But the thought of the undying Friend lifted him buoyantly above the dread of death, and he could look with an unwinking eye right into the fleshless eye-sockets of the skeleton, and say, I fear no evil, for Thou art with me.

So for poverty, loss, the blasting of earthly hopes, the crushing of earthly affections, the extremity of danger, and the utmost threatening of death, here is the sufficient remedy--that one mighty assurance: The Lord is my God. For if He is the strength of my heart, He will be my portion for ever. He is not poor who has God for his, nor does he wander with a hungry heart who can rest his heart on God's; nor need he fear death who possesses God, and in Him eternal life.

So, brethren, in all our changing circumstances, there is more than enough for us in that sweet, simple, strong thought. The end of sorrow (that is to say, the purpose thereof) is to breed in us the conviction that God is ours, to drive us to Him by lack of all beside; and the end of sorrow (that is to say, the termination thereof) is the kindling in our hearts of the light of that blessed assurance, for with Him we shall fear no evil. You never know the good of the breakwater until the storm is rolling the waves against its outer side. Light a little candle in a room, and you will not see the lightning when it flashes outside, however stormy the sky, and seamed with the fiery darts. If we have God in our hearts, we have enough for courage and for strength.

I need not remind you, I suppose, how this darkest moment of David's fortunes was the moment at which the darkness broke. Three days after this emeute of his turbulent followers, there came a fugitive into the camp with news that Saul was dead and David was king. So it was not in vain that he had strengthened himself in the Lord his God. Our light affliction which is but for a moment leads on to a manifestation of the true power of God our Friend, and to the breaking of the day.

**III. And now the last thing to be noted is the effort by which this assurance is attained and sustained.**

The words of the original convey even more forcibly than those of our translation the thought of David's own action in securing him the hold of God as his. He strengthened himself in the Lord his God. The Hebrew conveys the notion of effort, persistent and continuous; and it tells us this, that when things are as black as they were round David at that hour--it is not a matter of course, even for a good man, that there shall well up in his heart this tranquillising and victorious conviction; but he has to set himself to reach and to keep it. God will give it, but He will not give it unless the man strains after it. David strengthened himself in the Lord, and if he had not doggedly set about resisting the pressure of circumstances, and flinging himself as it were, by an effort, into the arms of God, circumstances would have been too strong for him, and despair would have shrouded his soul. In the darkest moment it is possible for a man to surround himself with God's light, but even in the brightest it is not possible to do so unless he makes a serious effort.

That effort must consist mainly in two things. One is that we shall honestly try to occupy our minds, as well as our hearts, with the truth which certifies to us that God is, in very deed, ours. If we never think, or think languidly and rarely, about what God has revealed to us, by the word and life and death and intercession of Jesus Christ, concerning Himself, His heart of love towards us, and His relations to us, then we shall not have, either in the time of disaster or of joy, the blessed sense that He is indeed ours. If a man will not think about Christian truth he will not have the blessedness of Christian possession of God. There is no mystery about the road to the sweetness and holiness and power that may belong to a Christian. The only way to win them is to be occupied, far more than most of us are, with the plain truths of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. If you never think about them they cannot affect you, and they will not make you sure that God is yours.

But we cannot occupy ourselves with these truths unless we have a distinct and resolute purpose running through our lives, of averting our eyes from the things that might make us lose sight of them and of Him. David had his choice. He could either, as a great many of us do, stand there and look, and look, and look, and see nothing but his disasters, or he could look past them; and see beyond them God. Peter had his choice whether he would look at the water, or whether he would look at Jesus Christ. He chose to look at the water; and when he saw the wind boisterous he began to sink--of course, and when he looked at Christ and cried: Lord, save me! he was held up--equally of course. Make the effort not to let the sorrowful things, or the difficult things, or the fearful things, or the joyous things, in your life, absorb you, but turn away, and, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, in another connection, look off unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith. David had to put constraint upon himself, to admit any other thoughts into his mind than those that were pressed into it by the facts before his eyes; but he put on the constraint, and so he was encouraged because he encouraged himself.

There is another thing which we have to make an effort to do, if we would have the blessedness of this conviction filling and flooding our hearts. For the possession is reciprocal; we say, My God, and He says, My people. Unless we yield ourselves to Him and say, I am Thine, we shall never be able to say, Thou art mine. We must recognise His possession of us; we must yield ourselves; we must obey; we must elect Him as our chief good, we must feel that we are not our own, but bought with a price. And then when we look up into the heavens thus submissive, thus obedient, thus owning His authority and His rights, as well as claiming His love and His tenderness, and cry: My Father, He will bend down and whisper into our hearts: Thou art My beloved son. Then we shall be strong, and of a good courage, however weak and timid, and we shall be rich, though, like David, we have lost all things.