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

**1 TIMOTHY-002**. **THE GOSPEL OF THE GLORY OF THE HAPPY GOD by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"The glorious gospel of the blessed God."*

*1 Timothy 1:11*

Two remarks of an expository character will prepare the way for our consideration of this text. The first is, that the proper rendering is that which is given in the Revised Version--the gospel of the glory, not the glorious gospel. The Apostle is not telling us what kind of thing the Gospel is, but what it is about. He is dealing not with its quality, but with its contents. It is a Gospel which reveals, has to do with, is the manifestation of, the glory of God.

Then the other remark is with reference to the meaning of the word blessed. There are two Greek words which are both translated blessed in the New Testament. One of them, the more common, literally means well spoken of, and points to the action of praise or benediction; describes what a man is when men speak well of him, or what God is when men praise and magnify His name. But the other word, which is used here, and is only applied to God once more in Scripture, has no reference to the human attribution of blessing and praise to Him, but describes Him altogether apart from what men say of Him, as what He is in Himself, the blessed, or, as we might almost say, the happy God. If the word happy seems too trivial, suggesting ideas of levity, of turbulence, of possible change, then I do not know that we can find any better word than that which is already employed in my text, if only we remember that it means the solemn, calm, restful, perpetual gladness that fills the heart of God.

So much, then, being premised, there are three points that seem to me to come out of this remarkable expression of my text. First, the revelation of God in Christ, of which the Gospel is the record, is the glory of God. Second, that revelation is, in a very profound sense, an element in the blessedness of God. And, lastly, that revelation is the good news for men. Let us look at these three points, then, in succession.

**I. Take, first, that striking thought that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the glory of God.**

The theme, or contents, or purpose of the whole Gospel, is to set forth and make manifest to men the glory of God.

Now what do we mean by the glory? I think, perhaps, that question may be most simply answered by remembering the definite meaning of the word in the Old Testament. There it designates, usually, that supernatural and lustrous light which dwelt between the Cherubim, the symbol of the presence and of the self-manifestation of God. So that we may say, in brief, that the glory of God is the sum-total of the light that streams from His self-revelation, considered as being the object of adoration and praise by a world that gazes upon Him.

And if this be the notion of the glory of God, is it not a startling contrast which is suggested between the apparent contents and the real substance of that Gospel? Suppose a man, for instance, who had no previous knowledge of Christianity, being told that in it he would find the highest revelation of the glory of God. He comes to the book, and finds that the very heart of it is not about God, but about a man; that this revelation of the glory of God is the biography of a man; and more than that, that the larger portion of that biography is the story of the humiliations, and the sufferings, and the death of the man. Would it not strike him as a strange paradox that the history of a man's life was the shining apex of all revelations of the glory of God? And yet so it is, and the Apostle, just because to him the Gospel was the story of the Christ who lived and died, declares that in this story of a human life, patient, meek, limited, despised, rejected, and at last crucified, lies, brighter than all other flashings of the divine light, the very heart of the lustre and palpitating centre and fontal source of all the radiance with which God has flooded the world. The history of Jesus Christ is the glory of God. And that involves two or three considerations on which I dwell briefly.

One of them is this: Christ, then, is the self-revelation of God. If, when we deal with the story of His life and death, we are dealing simply with the biography of a man, however pure, lofty, inspired he may be, then I ask what sort of connection there is between that biography which the four Gospels gives us, and what my text says is the substance of the Gospel? What force of logic is there in the Apostle's words: God commendeth His love toward us in that whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for us, unless there is some altogether different connection between the God who commends His love and the Christ who dies to commend it, than exists between a mere man and God? Brethren! to deliver my text, and a hundred other passages of Scripture, from the charge of being extravagant nonsense, and clear, illogical non sequiturs, you must believe that in that man Christ Jesus we behold His glory--the glory of the only begotten of the Father; and that when we look--haply not without some touch of tenderness and awed admiration in our hearts--upon His gentleness, we have to say, the patient God; when we look upon His tears we have to say, the pitying God; when we look upon His Cross we have to say, the redeeming God; and gazing upon the Man, to see in Him the manifest divinity. Oh! listen to that voice, He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father, and bow before the story of the human life as being the revelation of the indwelling God.

And then, still further, my text suggests that this self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the very climax and highest point of all God's revelations to men. I believe that the loftiest exhibition and conception of the divine character which is possible to us must be made to us in the form of a man. I believe that the law of humanity, for ever, in heaven as on earth, is this, that the Son is the revealer of God; and that no loftier--yea, at bottom, no other--communication of the divine nature can be made to man than is made in Jesus Christ.

But be that as it may, let me urge upon you this thought, that in that wondrous story of the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ the very high-water mark of divine self-communication has been touched and reached. All the energies of the divine nature are embodied there. The riches, both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God, are in the Cross and Passion of our Saviour. To declare at this time His righteousness Jesus Christ came to die. The Cross is the power of God unto salvation. Or, to put it into other words, and avail oneself of an illustration, we know the old story of the queen who, for the love of an unworthy human heart, dissolved pearls in the cup and gave them to him to drink. We may say that God comes to us, and for the love of us, reprobate and unworthy, has melted all the jewels of His nature into that cup of blessing which He offers to us, saying: Drink ye all of it. The whole Godhead, so to speak, is smelted down to make that rushing river of molten love which flows from the Cross of Christ into the hearts of men. Here is the highest point of God's revelation of Himself.

And my text implies, still further, that the true living, flashing centre of the glory of God is the love of God. Christendom is more than half heathen yet, and it betrays its heathenism not least in its vulgar conceptions of the divine nature and its glory. The majestic attributes which separate God from man, and make Him unlike His creatures, are the ones which people too often fancy belong to the glorious side of His character. They draw distinctions between grace and glory, and think that the latter applies mainly to what I might call the physical and the metaphysical, and less to the moral, attributes of the divine nature. We adore power, and when it is expanded to infinity we think that it is the glory of God. But my text delivers us from all such misconceptions. If we rightly understand it, then we learn this, that the true heart of the glory is tenderness and love. Of power that weak man hanging on the Cross is a strange embodiment; but if we learn that there is something more godlike in God than power, then we can say, as we look upon Jesus Christ: Lo! this is our God. We have waited for Him, and He will save us. Not in the wisdom that knows no growth, not in the knowledge which has no border-land of ignorance ringing it round about, not in the unwearied might of His arm, not in the exhaustless energy of His being, not in the unslumbering watchfulness of His all-seeing eye, not in that awful presence wheresoever creatures are; not in any or in all of these lies the glory of God, but in His love. These are the fringes of the brightness; this is the central blaze. The Gospel is the Gospel of the glory of God, because it is all summed up in the one word--God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

**II. Now, in the next place, the revelation of God in Christ is an element in the blessedness of God.**

We are come here into places where we see but very dimly, and it becomes us to speak very cautiously. Only as we are led by the divine teaching may we affirm at all. But it cannot be unwise to accept in simple literality utterances of Scripture, however they may seem to strike us as strange. And so I would say--the philosopher's God may be all-sufficient and unemotional, the Bible's God delighteth in mercy, rejoiceth in His gifts, and is glad when men accept them. It is something, surely, amid all the griefs and sorrows of this sorrow-haunted and devil-hunted world, to rise to this lofty region and to feel that there is a living personal joy at the heart of the universe. If we went no further, to me there is infinite beauty and mighty consolation and strength in that one thought--the happy God. He is not, as some ways of representing Him figure Him to be, what the older astronomers thought the sun was, a great cold orb, black and frigid at the heart, though the source and centre of light and warmth to the system. But He Himself is joy, or if we dare not venture on that word, which brings with it earthly associations, and suggests the possibility of alteration--He is the blessed God. And the Psalmist saw deeply into the divine nature, who, not contented with hymning His praise as the possessor of the fountain of life, and the light whereby we see light, exclaimed in an ecstasy of anticipation, Thou makest us to drink of the rivers of Thy pleasures.

But there is a great deal more than that here, if not in the word itself, at least in its connection, which connection seems to suggest that, howsoever the divine nature must be supposed to be blessed in its own absolute and boundless perfectness, an element in the blessedness of God Himself arises from His self-communication through the Gospel to the world. All love delights in imparting. Why should not God's? On the lower level of human affection we know that it is so, and on the highest level we may with all reverence venture to say, The quality of that mercy ... is twice blest, and that divine love blesseth Him that gives and them that take.

He created a universe because He delights in His works, and in having creatures on whom He can lavish Himself. He rests in His love, and rejoices over us with singing when we open our hearts to the reception of His light, and learn to know Him as He has declared Himself in His Christ. The blessed God is blessed because He is God. But He is blessed too because He is the loving and, therefore, the giving God.

What a rock-firmness such a thought as this gives to the mercy and the love that He pours out upon us! If they were evoked by our worthiness we might well tremble, but when we know, according to the grand words familiar to many of us, that it is His nature and property to be merciful, and that He is far gladder in giving than we can be in receiving, then we may be sure that His mercy endureth for ever, and that it is the very necessity of His being--and He cannot turn His back upon Himself--to love, to pity, to succour, and to bless.

**III. And so, lastly, the revelation of God in Christ is good news for us all.**

The Gospel of the glory of the blessed God. How that word Gospel has got tarnished and enfeebled by constant use and unreflective use, so that it slips glibly off my tongue and falls without producing any effect upon your hearts! It needs to be freshened up by considering what really it means. It means this: here are we like men shut up in a beleaguered city, hopeless, helpless, with no power to break out or to raise the siege; provisions failing, death certain. Some of you older men and women remember how that was the case in that awful siege of Paris, in the Franco-German War, and what expedients were adopted in order to get some communication from without. And here to us, prisoned, comes, as it did to them, a despatch borne under a dove's wing, and the message is this:--God is love; and that you may know that He is, He has sent you His Son who died on the Cross, the sacrifice for a world's sin. Believe it, and trust it, and all your transgressions will pass away.

My brother, is not that good news? Is it not the good news that you need--the news of a Father, of pardon, of hope, of love, of strength, of purity, of heaven? Does it not meet our fears, our forebodings, our wants at every point? It comes to you. What do you do with it? Do you welcome it eagerly, do you clutch it to your hearts, do you say, This is my Gospel? Oh! let me beseech you, welcome the message; do not turn away from the word from heaven, which will bring life and blessedness to all your hearts! Some of you have turned away long enough, some of you, perhaps, are fighting with the temptation to do so again even now. Let me press that ancient Gospel upon your acceptance, that Christ the Son of God has died for you, and lives to bless and help you. Take it and live! So shall you find that, as cold water to a thirsty soul, so is this best of all news from the far country.