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

**1 TIMOTHY-006**. **THE GLORY OF THE KING by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Now, unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen."*

*1 Timothy 1:17*

With this burst of irrepressible praise the Apostle ends his reference to his own conversion as a transcendent, standing instance of the infinite love and transforming power of God. Similar doxologies accompany almost all his references to the same fact. This one comes from the lips of Paul the aged, looking back from almost the close of a life which owed many sorrows and troubles to that day on the road to Damascus. His heart fills with thankfulness that overflows into the great words of my text. He had little to be thankful for, judged according to the rules of sense; but, though weighed down with care, having made but a poor thing of the world because of that vision which he saw that day, and now near martyrdom, he turns with a full heart to God, and breaks into this song of thanksgiving. There are lives which bear to be looked back upon. Are ours of that kind?

But my object is mainly to draw your attention to what seems to me a remarkable feature in this burst of thanksgiving. And perhaps I shall best impress the thought which it has given to me if I ask you to look, first, at the character of the God who is glorified by Paul's salvation; second, at the facts which glorify such a God; and, last, at the praise which should fill the lives of those who know the facts.

**I. First, then, notice the God who is glorified by Paul's salvation.**

Now what strikes me as singular about this great doxology is the characteristics, or, to use a technical word, the attributes, of the divine nature which the Apostle selects. They are all those which separate God from man; all those which present Him as arrayed in majesty, apart from human weaknesses, unapproachable by human sense, and filling a solitary throne. These are the characteristics which the Apostle thinks receive added lustre, and are lifted to a loftier height of honour and glory, by the small fact that he, Paul, was saved from sins as he journeyed to Damascus.

It would be easy to roll out oratorical platitudes about these specific characteristics of the divine nature, but that would be as unprofitable as it would be easy. All that I want to do now is just to note the force of the epithets; and, if I can, to deepen the impression of the remarkableness of their selection.

With regard, then, to the first of them, we at once feel that the designation of the King is unfamiliar to the New Testament. It brings with it lofty ideas, no doubt; but it is not a name which the writers of the New Testament, who had been taught in the school of love, and led by a Son to the knowledge of God, are most fond of using. The King has melted into the Father. But here Paul selects that more remote and less tender name for a specific purpose. He is the King--not eternal, as our Bible renders it, but more correctly the King of the Ages. The idea intended is not so much that of unending existence as that He moulds the epochs of the world's history, and directs the evolution of its progress. It is the thought of an overruling Providence, with the additional thought that all the moments are a linked chain, through which He flashes the electric force of His will. He is King of the Ages.

The other epithets are more appropriately to be connected with the word God which follows than with the word King which precedes. The Apostle's meaning is this: The King of the ages, even the God who is, etc. And the epithets thus selected all tend in the same direction. Incorruptible. That at once parts that mystic and majestic Being from all of which the law is decay. There may be in it some hint of moral purity, but more probably it is simply what I may call a physical attribute, that that immortal nature not only does not, but cannot, pass into any less noble forms. Corruption has no share in His immortal being.

As to invisible, no word need be said to illustrate that. It too points solely to the separation of God from all approach by human sense.

And then the last of the epithets, which, according to the more accurate reading of the text, should be, not as our Bible has it, the only wise God, but the only God, lifts Him still further above all comparison and contact with other beings.

So the whole set forth the remote attributes which make a man feel, The gulf between Him and me is so great that thought cannot pass across it, and I doubt whether love can live half-way across that flight, or will not rather, like some poor land bird with tiny wings, drop exhausted, and be drowned in the abyss before it reaches the other side. We expect to find a hymn to the infinite love. Instead of that we get praise, which might be upon the lips of many a thinker of Paul's day and of ours, who would laugh the idea of revelation, and especially of a revelation such as Paul believed in, to absolute scorn. And yet he knew what he was saying when he did not lift up his praise to the God of tenderness, of pity, of forgiveness, of pardoning love, but to the King of the ages; the incorruptible, invisible, only God; the God whose honour and glory were magnified by the revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ.

**II. And so that brings me, in the second place, to ask you to look at the facts which glorify even such a God.**

Paul was primarily thinking of his own individual experience; of what passed when the voice spoke to him, Why persecutest thou Me? and of the transforming power which had changed him, the wolf, with teeth red with the blood of the saints, into a lamb. But, as he is careful to point out, the personal allusion is lost in his contemplation of his own history, as being a specimen and test-case for the blessing and encouragement of all who should hereafter believe upon Him unto life everlasting. So what we come to is this--that the work of Jesus Christ is that which paints the lily and gilds the refined gold of the divine loftinesses and magnificence, and which brings honour and glory even to that remote and inaccessible majesty. For, in that revelation of God in Jesus Christ, there is added to all these magnificent and all but inconceivable attributes and excellences, something that is far diviner and nobler than themselves.

There be two great conceptions smelted together in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, of which neither attains its supremest beauty except by the juxtaposition of the other. Power is harsh, and scarcely worthy to be called divine, unless it be linked with love. Love is not glorious unless it be braced and energised by power. And, says Paul, these two are brought together in Jesus; and therefore each is heightened by the other. It is the love of God that lifts His power to its highest height; it is the revelation of Him as stooping that teaches us His loftiness. It is because He has come within the grasp of our humanity in Jesus Christ that we can hymn our highest and noblest praises to the King eternal, the invisible God.

The sunshine falls upon the snow-clad peaks of the great mountains and flushes them with a tender pink that makes them nobler and fairer by far than when they were veiled in clouds. And so all the divine majesty towers higher when we believe in the divine condescension, and there is no god that men have ever dreamed of so great as the God who stoops to sinners and is manifest in the flesh and Cross of the Man of Sorrows.

Take these characteristics of the divine nature as get forth in the text one by one, and consider how the Revelation in Jesus Christ, and its power on sinful men, raises our conceptions of them. The King of the ages--and do we ever penetrate so deeply into the purpose which has guided His hand, as it moulded and moved the ages, as when we can say with Paul that His good pleasure is that, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ. The intention of the epochs as they emerge, the purpose of all their linked intricacies and apparently diverse movements, is this one thing, that God in Christ may be manifest to men, a nd that humanity may be gathered, like sheep round the Shepherd, into the one fold of the one Lord. For that the world stands; for that the ages roll, and He who is the King of the epochs hath put into the hands of the Lamb that was slain the Book that contains all their events; and only His hand, pierced upon Calvary, is able to open the seals, to read the Book. The King of the ages is the Father of Christ.

And in like manner, that incorruptible God, far away from us because He is so, and to whom we look up here doubtingly and despairingly and often complainingly and ask, Why hast Thou made us thus, to be weighed upon with the decay of all things and of ourselves? comes near to us all in the Christ who knows the mystery of death, and thereby makes us partakers of an inheritance incorruptible. Brethren, we shall never adore, or even dimly understand, the blessedness of believing in a God who cannot decay nor change, unless from the midst of graves and griefs we lift our hearts to Him as revealed in the face of the dying Christ. He, though He died, did not see corruption, and we through Him shall pass into the same blessed immunity.

The King ... the God invisible. No man hath seen God at any time, nor can see Him. Who will honour and glorify that attribute which parts Him wholly from our sense, and so largely from our apprehension, as will he who can go on to say, the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him. We look up into a waste Heaven; thought and fear, and sometimes desire, travel into its tenantless spaces. We say the blue is an illusion; there is nothing there but blackness. But he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. And we can lift thankful praise to Him, the King invisible, when we hear Jesus saying, thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee.

The only God. How that repels men from His throne! And yet, if we apprehend the meaning of Christ's Cross and work, we understand that the solitary God welcomes my solitary soul into such mysteries and sacred sweetnesses of fellowship with Himself that, the humanity remaining undisturbed, and the divinity remaining unintruded upon, we yet are one in Him, and partakers of a divine nature. Unless we come to God through Jesus Christ, the awful attributes in the text spurn a man from His throne, and make all true fellowship impossible.

So let me remind you that the religion which does not blend together in indissoluble union these two, the majesty and the lowliness, the power and the love, the God inaccessible and the God who has tabernacled with us in Jesus Christ, is sure to be almost an impotent religion. Deism in all its forms, the religion which admits a God and denies a revelation; the religion which, in some vague sense, admits a revelation and denies an incarnation; the religion which admits an incarnation and denies a sacrifice; all these have little to say to man as a sinner; little to say to man as a mourner; little power to move his heart, little power to infuse strength into his weakness. If once you strike out the thought of a redeeming Christ from your religion, the temperature will go down alarmingly, and all will soon be frost bound.

Brethren, there is no real adoration of the loftiness of the King of the ages, no true apprehension of the majesty of the God incorruptible, invisible, eternal, until we see Him in the face and in the Cross of Jesus Christ. The truths of this gospel of our salvation do not in the smallest degree impinge upon or weaken, but rather heighten, the glory of God. The brightest glory streams from the Cross. It was when He was standing within a few hours of it, and had it full in view, that Jesus Christ broke out into that strange strain of triumph, Now is God glorified. The King of the ages, incorruptible, invisible, the only God, is more honoured and glorified in the forgiveness that comes through Jesus Christ, and in the transforming power which He puts forth in the Gospel, than in all besides.

**III. Lastly, let me draw your attention to the praise which should fill the lives of those who know these facts.**

I said that this Apostle seems always, when he refers to his own individual conversion, to have been melted into fresh outpourings of thankfulness and of praise. And that is what ought to be the life of all of you who call yourselves Christians; a continual warmth of thankfulness welling up in the heart, and not seldom finding utterance in the words, but always filling the life.

Not seldom, I say, finding utterance in the words. It is a delicate thing for a man to speak about himself, and his own religious experience. Our English reticence, our social habits, and many other even less worthy hindrances rise in the way; and I should be the last man to urge Christian people to cast their pearls before swine, or too fully to

 Open wide the bridal chamber of the heart,

to let in the day. There is a wholesome fear of men who are always talking about their own religious experiences. But there are times and people to whom it is treason to the Master for us not to be frank in the confession of what we have found in Him. And I think there would be less complaining of the want of power in the public preaching of the Word if more professing Christians more frequently and more simply said to those to whom their words are weighty, Come and hear and I will tell you what God hath done for my soul. Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord. It is a strange way that Christian people in this generation have of discharging their obligations that they should go, as so many of them do, from the cradle of their Christian lives to their graves, never having opened their lips for the Master who has done all for them.

Only remember, if you venture to speak you will have to live your preaching. There is no speech nor language, their voice is not heard, their sound is gone out through all the earth. The silent witness of life must always accompany the audible proclamation, and in many cases is far more eloquent than it. Your consistent thankfulness manifested in your daily obedience, and in the transformation of your character, will do far more than all my preaching, or the preaching of thousands like me, to commend the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

One last word, brethren. This revelation is made to us all. What is God to you, friend? Is He a remote, majestic, unsympathising, terrible Deity? Is He dim, shadowy, unwelcome; or is He God whose love softens His power; Whose power magnifies his love? Oh! I beseech you, open your eyes and your hearts to see that that remote Deity is of no use to you, will do nothing for you, cannot help you, may probably judge you, but will never heal you. And open your hearts to see that the only God whom men can love is God in Christ. If here we lift up grateful praise unto Him that loveth us and hath loosed us from our sins in His blood, we, too, shall one day join in that great chorus which at last will be heard saying, Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.