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

**1 TIMOTHY-010**. **THE CONDUCT THAT SECURES THE REAL LIFE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."*

*1 Timothy 6:19*

In the first flush of the sense of brotherhood, the Church of Jerusalem tried the experiment of having all things in common. It was not a success, it was soon abandoned, it never spread. In the later history of the Church, and especially in these last Pauline letters, we see clearly that distinctions of pecuniary position were very definitely marked amongst the believers. There were rich men in the churches of which Timothy had charge. No doubt they were rich after a very modest fashion, for Paul's standard of opulence is not likely to have been a very high one, seeing that he himself ministered with his own hands to his necessities, and had only one cloak to keep him warm in winter time. But great or small as were the resources of these men, they were rich in comparison with some of their brethren. The words of my text are the close of the very plain things which Paul commands Timothy to tell them. He assures them that if they will be rich in good works, and ready to distribute, they will lay up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come.

The teaching in the text is, of course, a great deal wider than any specific application of it. It is very remarkable, especially as coming from Paul. Lay up a good foundation--has he not said, Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ? That they may lay hold on eternal life--has he not said, The gift of God is eternal life? Is he not going dead in the teeth of his own teaching, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by His mercy He saved us? I think not. Let us see what he does say.

**I. First, then, he says that the real life is the future life.**

Those of you who use the Revised Version will see that it makes an alteration in the last clause of our text, and instead of eternal life it reads the life which is life indeed, the true life; not simply designating it as eternal, but designating it as being the only thing that is worth calling by the august name of life.

Now it is quite clear that Paul here is approximating very closely to the language of his brother John, and using this great word life as being, in substance, equivalent to his own favourite word of salvation, as including in one magnificent generalisation all that is necessary for the satisfaction of man's needs, the perfection of his blessedness, and the glorifying of his nature. Paul's notion of life, like John's, is that it is the one all-comprehensive good which men need and seek.

And here he seems to relegate that life which is life indeed to the region of the future, because he contemplates it as being realised in the time to come, and as being the result of the conduct which is here enjoined. But you will find that substantially the same exhortation is given in the 12th verse of this chapter, Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on the life eternal--where the process of grasping this life, and therefore the possession of it, are evidently regarded as possible here, and the duty of every Christian man in this present world. That is to say, there is a double aspect of this august conception of the life which is life indeed. In one aspect it is present, may be and ought to be ours, here and now; in another aspect it lies beyond the flood, and is the inheritance reserved in the heavens. That double aspect is parallel with the way in which the New Testament deals with the other cognate conception of salvation, which it sometimes regards as past, sometimes as present, sometimes as future. The complete idea is that the life of the Christian soul here and yonder, away out into the furthest extremities of eternity, and up to the loftiest climax of perfectness, is in essence one, whilst yet the differences between the degree in which its germinal possession here and its full-fruited enjoyment hereafter differ is so great as that, in comparison with the completion that is waiting the Christian soul beyond the grave, all of the same life that is here enjoyed dwindles into nothingness. It appears to me that these two sides of the truth, the essential identity of the life of the Christian soul beyond and here, and the all but infinite differences and progresses which separate the two, are both needful, very needful, to be kept in view by us.

There is here on earth, amidst all our imperfections and weakness and sin, a root in the heart that trusts in Christ, which only needs to be transplanted into its congenial soil to blossom and burgeon into undreamed of beauty, and to bear fruit the savour of which no mortal lips can ever taste. The dwarfed rhododendrons in our shrubberies have in them the same nature as the giants that adorn the slopes of the Himalayas. Transplant these exotics to their native soil, and you would see what it was in them to be. Think of the life that is now at its best; its weakness, its blighted hopes, its thwarted aims, its foiled endeavours; think of its partings, its losses, its conflicts. Think of its disorders, its sins, and consequent sufferings; think of the shadow at its close, which flings long trails of blackness over many preceding years. Think of its swift disappearance, and then say if such a poor, fragmentary thing is worthy of the name of life, if that were all that the man was for.

But it is not all. There is a life which is life indeed, over which no shadow can pass, nor any sorrow darken the blessed faces or clog the happy hearts of those who possess it. They have all and abound. They know all and are at rest. They dread nothing, and nothing do they regret. They leave nothing behind as they advance, and of their serenity and their growth there is no end. That is worth calling life. It lies beyond this dim spot of earth. It is hid with Christ in God.

**II. Secondly, notice that conduct here determines the possession of the true life.**

Paul never cares whether he commits the rhetorical blunder of mixing up metaphors or not. That matters very little, except to a pedant and a rhetorician. In his impetuous way he blends three here, and has no time to stop to disentangle them. They all mean substantially the same thing which I have stated in the words that conduct here determines the possession of life hereafter; but they put it in three different figurative fashions which we may separate and look at one by one.

The first of them is this, that by our actions here we accumulate treasure hereafter. Laying up in store for themselves is one word in the original, and it contains even more than is expressed in our paraphrase, for it is really treasuring off. And the idea is that the rich man is bade to take a portion of his worldly goods, and, by using these for beneficent purposes, out of them to store a treasure beyond the grave. What is employed thus, and from the right motives and in the right way, is not squandered, but laid up in store. You remember the old epitaph,

What I spent I lost;

What I gave I have.

Now that is Christ's teaching, for did He not say: Sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven? Did He not say: Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, ... but lay up treasures in heaven? And if anybody's theology finds it difficult to incorporate these solemn teachings of our Lord with the rest of it, so much the worse for the theology.

I have no doubt at all that Christianity has yet a great deal to teach the Christian Church and the world about the acquisition of money and the disposal of money; and, though I do not want to dwell now upon that specific application of the general principle of my text, I cannot help reminding you, dear friends, that for a very large number of us, almost the most important influence shaping our characters is the attitude that we take in regard to these things--the getting and the distribution of worldly wealth. For the bulk of Christian people there are few things more important as sharp tests of the reality of their religion, or more effective in either ennobling or degrading their whole character, than what they do about these two plain matters.

But then my text goes a great deal further than that; and whilst it applies unflinchingly this principle to the one specific case, it invites us to apply it all round the circumference of our earthly conduct. What you are doing here is piling up for you, on the other side of the wall, what you will have to live with, and either get good or evil out of, through all eternity. A man who is going to Australia pays some money into a bank here, and when he gets to Melbourne it is punctually paid out to him across the counter. That is what we are doing here, lodging money on this side that we are going to draw on that. And it is this which gives to the present its mystical significance and solemnity, that all our actions are piling up for us future possessions: treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath; or, contrariwise, glory, immortality, honour, eternal life. We are like men digging a trench on one side of a hedge and flinging the spadefuls over to the other. They are all being piled up behind the barrier, and when we go round the end of it we shall find them all waiting for us.

Then the Apostle superimposes upon this another metaphor. He does not care to unravel it. Laying up in store for themselves a store, he would have said if he had been a pedant, which is also a good foundation. Now I take it that that does not mean a basis for hope, or anything of that sort, but that it conveys this thought, that our actions here are putting in the foundations on which the eternal building of our future life shall be reared. When a man excavates and lays the first courses of the stones of his building, he thereby determines every successive stage of it, until the headstone is brought forth with rejoicing. We are laying foundations in that profound sense in this world. Our nature takes a set here, and I fail to see any reason cognisable by us why that ply of the nature should ever be taken out of it in any future. I do not dogmatise; but it seems to me that all that we do know of life and of God's dealings in regard to man leads us to suppose that the next world is a world of continuations, not of beginnings; that it is the second volume of the book, and hangs logically and necessarily upon the first that was finished when a man died. Our lives here and hereafter appear to me to be like some geometrical figure that wants two sheets of paper for its completion: on the first the lines run up to the margin, and on the second they are carried on in the direction which was manifest in the section that was visible here.

And so, dear friends, let us remember that this is the reason why our smallest acts are so tremendous that by our actions we are making character, and that character is destiny, here and hereafter. You are putting in the foundations of the building that you have to live in; see that they are of such a sort as will support a house eternal in the heavens.

The last of the metaphors under which the Apostle suggests the one idea is that our conduct here determines our capacity to lay hold of the prize. It seems to me that the same allusion is lingering in his mind which is definitely stated in the previous verse to which I have already referred, where the eternal life which Timothy is exhorted to lay hold of is regarded as being the prize of the good fight of faith, which he is exhorted to fight. And so the third metaphor here is that which is familiar in Paul's writings, where eternal life is regarded as a garland or prize, given to the victor in race or arena. It is exactly the same notion as he otherwise expresses when he says that he follows after if that he may lay hold of that for which also he is laid hold of by Jesus Christ. This is the underlying thought, that according to a Christian man's acts here is his capacity of receiving the real life yonder.

That is not given arbitrarily. Each man gets as much of it when he goes home as he can hold. The tiniest vessel is filled, the largest vessel is filled. But the little vessel may, and will, grow bigger if that which is deposited in it be rightly employed. Let us lay this to heart, that Christian men dare not treat it as a matter of indifference whether to the full they live lives consistent with their profession, and do the will of their Master or no. It is not all the same, and it will not be all the same yonder, whether we have adorned the teaching, or whether our lives have habitually and criminally fallen beneath the level of our professions. Brethren, we are too apt to forget that there is such a thing as being saved, yet so as by fire; and that there is such a thing as having an entrance ministered abundantly into the Kingdom. Be you sure of this, that if the hands of your spirits are ever to be capable of grasping the prize, it must be as the result of conduct here on earth, which has been treasuring up treasures yonder, and laying a foundation on which the incorruptible house may solidly rest.

**III. And now the last word that I have to say is that these principles are perfectly compatible with the great truth of salvation by faith.**

For observe to whom the text is spoken. It is to men who have professed to be believers, and it is on the ground of their faith that these rich men in Timothy's churches are exhorted to this conduct. There is no incompatibility between the doctrine that eternal life is the gift of God, and the placing of those who have received that gift under a strict law of recompense.

That is the teaching of the whole New Testament. It was to Christian men that it was said: Be not deceived; God is not mocked, whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. It is the teaching of Jesus Christ Himself.

But there is a dreadful danger that we, with our partial vision, shall see one side of the truth so clearly that we do not see the other; and so you get two antagonistic schools of Christian teaching who have torn the one word into halves. One of them says, Man is saved by faith only, and forgets faith without works is dead; and the other says, Do your duty, and never mind about your belief, and forgets that the belief--the trust--is the only sure foundation on which conduct can be based, and the only source from which it is certain to flow.

Now, if I should not be misunderstood by that same narrow and contracted vision of which I have been speaking, I would venture to say that salvation by faith alone may be so held as to be a very dangerous doctrine, and that there is a very real sense in which a man is saved by works. And if you do not like that, go home and read the Epistle of James, and see what you make of his teaching: Ye see, brethren, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Faith wrought with his works, and by his works was his faith made perfect.

Only let us understand where the exhortation of the text comes in. We have to begin with absolute departure from all merit in work, and the absolute casting of ourselves on Jesus Christ. If you have not done that, my brother, the teaching Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation has no application to you, but this teaching has, Other foundation can no man lay. Behold, I lay in Zion a tried corner-stone. Whosoever believeth in Him shall not make haste. If you have not committed your souls and selves and lives and hopes to Jesus Christ, the teaching Lay hold on eternal life has only a very modified application to you, because the only hand that can grasp that life is the hand of faith that is content to receive it from His hands with the prints of the nails in them. But if you have given yourselves to that Saviour, and received the germinal gift of eternal life from Him, then, take my text as absolutely imperative for you. Remember that it is for you, resting on Christ, to treasure up eternal life; for you to build on that sure foundation gold and silver and precious stones which may stand the fire; for you, by faithful continuance in well-doing, to lay hold of that for which you have been laid hold of by Jesus Christ. May it be true of all of us that our works do follow us!

Thy works, thine alms, and all thy good endeavour Stayed not behind, nor in the grave were trod, But, as Faith pointed with her golden rod, Followed thee up to joy and bliss for ever.