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

**2 CHRONICLES-005. ASA'S PRAYER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with Thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on Thee, and in Thy Name we go against this multitude. O Lord, Thou art our God; let not man prevail against Thee."*

*2 Chronicles 14:11*

This King Asa, Rehoboam's grandson, had had a long reign of peace, which the writer of the Book of Chronicles traces to the fact that he had rooted out idolatry from Judah, The land had rest, and he no war ... because the Lord had given him rest.

But there came a time when the war-cloud began to roll threateningly over the land, and a great army--the numbers of which, from their immense magnitude, seem to be erroneously given--came up against him. Like a wise man he made his military dispositions first, and prayed next. He set his troops in order, and then he fell down on his knees, and spoke to God.

Now, it seems to me that this prayer contains the very essence of what ought to be the Christian attitude in reference to all the conditions and threatening dangers and conflicts of life; and so I wish to run over it, and bring out the salient points of it, as typical of what ought to be our disposition.

**I. The wholesome consciousness of our own impotence.**

It did not take much to convince Asa that he had no power. His army, according to the numbers given of the two hosts, was outnumbered two to one; and so it did not require much reflection to say, We have no might. But although perhaps not so sufficiently obvious to us, as truly as in the case in our text, if we look fairly in the face our duties, our tasks, our dangers, the possibilities of life and its certainties, the more humbly we think of our own capacity, the more wisely we shall think about God, and the more truly we shall estimate ourselves. The world says, Self-reliance is the conquering virtue; Jesus says to us, Self-distrust is the condition of all victory. And that does not mean any mere shuffling off of responsibility from our own shoulders, but it means looking the facts of our lives, and of our own characters, in the face. And if we will do that, however apparently easy may be our course, and however richly endowed in mind, body, or estate we may be, if we all do that honestly, we shall find that we each are like the man with ten thousand that has to meet the King that comes against him with twenty thousand; and we shall not desire conditions of peace with our enemy, for that is not what in this case we have to do, but we shall look about us, and not keep our eyes on the horizon, and on the levels of earth, but look up to see if there is not there an Ally that we can bring into the field to redress the balance, and to make our ten as strong as the opposing twenty. Zerah the Ethiopian, who was coming down on Asa, is said to have had a million fighting-men at his back, but that is probably an erroneous figure, because Old Testament numbers are necessarily often unreliable. Asa had only half the number; so he said, What can I do? And what could he do? He did the only thing possible, he grasped at God's skirts, and prayed, and that made all the difference.

Now all that is true about the disproportion between the foes we have to face and fight and our own strength. It is eminently true about us Christian people, if we are doing any work for our Master. You hear people say, Look at the small number of professing Christians in this country, as compared with the numbers on the other side. What is the use of their trying to convert the world? Well, think of the assembled Christian people, for instance, of Manchester, on the most charitable supposition, and the shallowest interpretation of that word Christian. What are they among so many? A mere handful. If the Christian Church had to undertake the task of Christianising the world by its own strength, we might well despair of success and stop altogether. We have no might. The disproportion both numerically and in all things that the world estimates as strength (which are many of them good things), is so great that we are in a worse case than Asa was. It is not two to one; it is twenty to one, or an even greater disproportion. But we are not only numerically weak. A multitude of non-effectives, mere camp followers, loosely attached, nominal Christians, have to be deducted from the muster-roll, and the few who are left are so feeble as well as few that they have more than enough to do in holding their own, to say nothing of dreaming of charging the wide-stretching lines of the enemy. So a profound self-distrust is our wisdom. But that should not paralyse us, but lead to something better, as it led Asa.

**II. Summoning God into the field should follow wholesome self-distrust.**

Asa uses a remarkable expression, which is, perhaps, scarcely reproduced adequately in our Authorised Version: It is nothing with Thee to help, whether with many or with them that have no power. It is a strange phrase, but it seems most probable that the suggested rendering in the Revised Version is nearer the writer's meaning, which says, Lord! there is none beside Thee to help between the mighty and them that have no power, which to our ears is a somewhat cumbrous way of saying that God, and God only, can adjust the difference between the mighty and the weak; can redress the balance, and by the laying of His hand upon the feeble hand can make it strong as the mailed fist to which it is opposed. If we know ourselves to be hopelessly outnumbered, and send to God for reinforcements, He will clash His sword into the scale, and make it go down. Asa turns to God and says, Thou only canst trim the scales and make the lighter of the two the heavier one by casting Thy might into it. So help us, O Lord our God!

One man with God at his back is always in the majority; and, however many there may be on the other side, there are more that be with us than they that be with them. There is encouragement for people who have to fight unpopular causes in the world, who have been accustomed to be in minorities all their days, in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation. Never mind about the numbers; bring God into the field, and the little band, which is compared in another place in these historical Books to two flocks of kids fronting the enemy, that had flowed all over the land, is in the majority. God with us; then we are strong.

The consciousness of weakness may unnerve a man; and that is why people in the world are always patting each other on the back and saying Be of good cheer, and rely upon yourself. But the self-distrust that turns to God becomes the parent of a far more reliable self-reliance than that which trusts to men. My consciousness of need is my opening the door for God to come in. Just as you always find the lakes in the hollows, so you will always find the grace of God coming into men's hearts to strengthen them and make them victorious, when there has been the preparation of the lowered estimate of one's self. Hollow out your heart by self-distrust, and God will fill it with the flashing waters of His strength bestowed. The more I feel myself weak, the more I am meant not to fold my hands and say, I never can do that thing; it is of no use my trying to attempt it, I may as well give it up; but to say, Lord I there is none beside Thee that can set the balance right between the mighty and him that hath no strength. Help me, O Lord my God! Just as those little hermit-crabs that you see upon the seashore, with soft bodies unprotected, make for the first empty shell they can find, and house in that and make it their fortress, our exposed natures, our unarmoured characters, our sense of weakness, ought to drive us to Him. As the unarmed population of a land invaded by the enemy pack their goods and hurry to the nearest fortified place, so when I say to myself I have no strength, let me say, Thou art my Rock, my Strength, my Fortress, and my Deliverer. My God, in whom I trust, my Buckler, and the Horn of my Salvation, and my high Tower.

Now, there is one more word about this matter, and that is, the way by which we summon God into the field. Asa prays, Help us, O Lord our God! for we rest on Thee; and the word that he employs for rest is not a very frequent one. It carries with it a very striking picture. Let me illustrate it by a reference to another case where it is employed. It is used in that tragical story of the death of Saul, when the man that saw the last of him came to David and drew in a sentence the pathetic picture of the wearied, wounded, broken-hearted, discrowned, desperate monarch, leaning on his spear. You can understand how hard he leaned, with what a grip he held it, and how heavily his whole languid, powerless weight pressed upon it. And that is the word that is used here. We lean on Thee as the wounded Saul leaned upon his spear. Is that a picture of your faith, my friend? Do you lean upon God like that, laying your hand upon Him till every vein on your hand stands out with the force and tension of the grasp? Or do you lean lightly, as a man that does not feel much the need of a support? Lean hard if you wish God to come quickly. We rest on Thee; help us, O Lord!

**III. Courageous advance should follow self-distrust and summoning God by faith.**

It is well when self-distrust leads to confidence, when, as Charles Wesley has it in his great hymn:

I am weak,

But confident in self-despair.

But that is not enough. It is better when self-distrust and confidence in God lead to courage, and as Asa goes on, Help us, for we rely on Thee, and in Thy name we go against this multitude. Never mind though it is two to one. What does that matter? Prudence and calculation are well enough, but there is a great deal of very rank cowardice and want of faith in Christian people, both in regard to their own lives and in regard to Christian work in the world, which goes masquerading under much too respectable a name, and calls itself judicious caution and prudence. There is little ever done by that, especially in the Christian course; and the old motto of one of the French republicans holds good; Dare! dare! always dare! You have more on your side than you have against you, and creeping prudence of calculation is not the temper in which the battle is won. Dash is not always precipitate and presumptuous. If we have God with us, let us be bold in fronting the dangers and difficulties that beset us, and be sure that He will help us.

**IV. And now the last point that I would notice is this--the all-powerful plea which God will answer.**

Thou art my God, let not man prevail against Thee. That prayer covers two things. You may be quite sure that if God is your God you will not be beaten; and you may be quite sure that if you have made God's cause yours He will make your cause His, and again you will not be beaten.

Thou art our God. It takes two to make a bargain, and God and we have both to act before He is truly ours. He gives Himself to us, but there is an act of ours required too, and you must take the God that is given to you, and make Him yours because you make yourselves His. And when I have taken Him for mine, and not unless I have, He is mine, to all intents of strength-giving and blessedness. When I can say, Thou art my God, and it is impossible that Thou wilt deny Thyself, then nothing can snap that bond; and neither life nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature can do it. But there is a creature that can, and that is I. For I can separate myself from the love and the guardianship of God, and He can say to a man, I am thy God, and the man not answer, Thou art my God.

And then there is another plea here. Let not man prevail against Thee. What business had Asa to identify his little kingdom and his victory with God's cause and God's conquest? Only this, that he had flung himself into God's arms, and because he had, and was trying to do what God would have him do, he was quite sure that it was not Asa but Jehovah that the million of Ethiopians were fighting against. People warn us against the fanaticism of taking for granted that our cause is God's cause. Well, we need the warning sometimes, but we may be quite sure of this, that if we have made God's cause ours, He will make our cause His, down to the minutest point in our daily lives.

And then, if thus we say in the depths of our hearts, and live accordingly, There is none other that fighteth for us, but only Thou, O God! it will be with us as it was with Asa in the story before us, the enemy fled, and could not recover themselves, for they were destroyed before the Lord and before His hosts.