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

**2 SAMUEL-006. DAVID'S GRATITUDE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"18. Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto? 19. And this was yet a small thing in Thy sight, O Lord God; but Thou hast spoken also of Thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? 20. And what can David say more unto Thee? for Thou, Lord God, knowest Thy servant. 21. For Thy word's sake, and according to Thine own heart, hast Thou done all these great things, to make Thy servant know them. 22. Wherefore Thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like Thee, neither is there any God besides Thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. 23. And what one nation in the earth is like Thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to Himself, and to make Him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for Thy land, before Thy people, which Thou redeemedst to Thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods? 24. For Thou hast confirmed to Thyself Thy people Israel to be a people unto Thee for ever: and Thou, Lord, art become their God. 25. And now, O Lord God, the word that Thou hast spoken concerning Thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as Thou hast said. 26. And let Thy name be magnified for ever, saying, The Lord of hosts is the God over Israel; and let the house of Thy servant David be established before Thee. 27. For Thou, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to Thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath Thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto Thee. 28. And now, O Lord God, Thou art that God, and Thy words be true, and Thou hast promised this goodness unto Thy servant: 29. Therefore now let it please Thee to bless the house of Thy servant, that it may continue for ever before Thee: for Thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it: and with Thy blessing let the house of Thy servant be blessed for ever."*

*2 Samuel 7:18-29*

God's promise by Nathan of the perpetuity of the kingdom in David's house made an era in the progress of revelation. A new element was thereby added to devout hope, and a new object presented to faith. The prophecy of the Messiah entered upon a new stage, bearing a relation, as its successive stages always did, to the history which supplies a framework for it. Now, for the first time, He can be set forth as the king of Israel; now the width of the promise, which at first embraced the seed of the woman, and then was limited to the seed of Abraham, and thereafter to the tribe of Judah, is still further limited to the house of David. The beam is narrowed as it is focussed into greater brilliance, and the personal Messiah begins to be faintly discerned in words which are to have a partial, preparatory fulfilment, in itself prophetic, in the collective Davidic monarchs whose office is itself a prophecy. This passage is the wonderful burst of praise which sprang from David's heart in answer to Nathan's words. In many of the Psalms later than this prophecy we find clear traces of that expectation of the personal Messiah, which gradually shaped itself, under divine inspiration, in David, as contained in Nathan's message But this thanksgiving prayer, which was the immediate reflection of the astounding new message, has not yet penetrated its depth nor discovered its rich contents, but sees in it only the promise of the continuance of kingship in his descendants. We do not learn the fulness of God's gracious promises on first hearing them. Life and experience and the teaching of His Spirit are needed to enable us to count our treasure, and we are richer than we know.

This prayer is a prose psalm outside the Psalter. It consists of two parts,--a burst of astonished thanksgiving and a stream of earnest petition, grasping the divine promise and turning it into a prayer.

**I.** Note the burst of thanksgiving (vs. 18-24). The ark dwelt in curtains, and into the temporary sanctuary went the king with his full heart. The somewhat peculiar attitude of sitting, while he poured it out to God, has offended some punctilious commentators, who will have it that we should translate remained, and not sat; but there is no need for the change. The decencies of public worship may require a posture which expresses devotion; but individual communion is free from such externals, and absorbed contemplation naturally disposes of the body so as least to hinder the spirit. The tone of almost bewildered surprise at the greatness of the gift is strong all through the prayer. The man's breath is almost taken away, and his words are sometimes broken, and throughout palpitating with emotion. Yet there is a plain progress of feeling and thought in them, and they may serve as a pattern of thanksgiving. Note the abrupt beginning, as if pent-up feeling forced its way, regardless of forms of devotion. The first emotion excited by God's great goodness is the sense of unworthiness. I do not deserve it, is the instinctive answer of the heart to any lavish human kindness, and how much more to God's! I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, springs to the devout lips most swiftly, when gazing on His miracles of bestowing love. He must know little of himself, and less of God, who is not most surely melted down to contrition, which has no bitterness or pain in it, by the coals of loving fire heaped by God on his head.

The consciousness of unworthiness passes, in verse 19, to adoring contemplation of God's astounding mercy, and especially of the new element in Nathan's prophecy,--the perpetuity of the Davidic sovereignty in the dim, far-off future. Thankfulness delights to praise the Giver for the greatness of His gift. Faith strengthens its hold of its blessings by telling them over, as a miser does his treasure. To recount them to God is the way to possess them more fully.

The difficult close of the verse cannot be discussed here. The law for man is nearer the literal meaning of the words than the manner of men (Rev. Ver.); and, unfortunately, man's manner is not the same as man's law. But the usual explanations are unsatisfactory. We would hazard the suggestion that this means that which God has spoken of thy servant's house, and that to call it the law for man is equivalent to an expression of absolute confidence in the authority, universality, and certain fulfilment of the promise. The speech of God is ever the law for man, and this new utterance stands on a level with the older law, and shall rule all mankind. The king's faith not only gazes on the great words of promise, but sees them triumphant on earth.

Then in verse 20 comes another bend of the stream of praise. The more full the heart, the more is it conscious of the weakness of all words. The deepest praise, like the truest love, speaks best in silence. It is blessed when, in earthly relations, we can trust our dear ones knowledge of us to interpret our poor words. It is more blessed when, in our speech to God, we can feel that our love and faith are deeper than our word, and that He does not judge them by it, but it by them.

Silence is His least injurious praise.

Here, too, we may note the two instances, in this verse, of what runs through the whole prayer,--David's avoidance of using I. Except in the lowly What am I? at the beginning, it never occurs; but he calls himself David twice and Thy servant ten times,--a striking, because unconscious, proof of his lowly sense of unworthiness.

But he can say more; and what he does further say goes yet deeper than his former words. The personal aspect of the promise retreats into the background, and the ground of all God's mercy in His own heart fills the thoughts. Some previous promise, perhaps that through Samuel, is referred to; but the great truth that God is His own motive, and that His love is not drawn forth by our deserts, but wells up by its own energy, like a perennial fountain, is the main thought of the verse. God is self-moved to bless, and He blesses that we may know Him through His gifts. The one thought is the central truth, level to our apprehension, concerning His nature; the other is the key to the meaning of all His workings. All comes to pass because He loves with a self-originated love, and in order that we may know the motive and principle of His acts. We can get no farther into the secret of God than that. We need nothing more for peaceful acceptance of His providences for ourselves and our brethren. All is from love; all is for the manifestation of love. He who has learned these truths sits at the centre and lives in light.

Verse 22 strikes a new note. The effect of God's dealing with David is to magnify His name, to teach His incomparable greatness, and to confirm by experience ancient words which celebrate it. The thankful heart rejoices in hearsay being changed into personal knowledge. As we have heard, so have we seen. Old truths flash up into new meaning, and only he who tastes and sees that God is good to him to-day really enters into the sweetness of His recorded past goodness.

Note the widening of David's horizon in verses 23 and 24 to embrace all Israel. His blessings are theirs. He feels his own relation to them as the culmination of the long series of past deliverances, and at the same time loses self in joy over Israel's confirmation as God's people by his kingship. True thankfulness regards personal blessings in their bearing on others, and shrinks from selfish use of them. Note, too, the parallel, if we may call it so, between Israel and Israel's God, in that there is none like Thee, and by reason of its choice by this incomparable Jehovah, no nation on earth is like Thy people, even like Israel.

Thus steadily does this model of thanksgiving climb up from a sense of unworthiness, through adoration and gazing on its treasures, to God's unmotived love as His impulse, and men's knowledge of that love as His aim, and pauses at last, rapt and hushed, before the solitary loftiness of the incomparable God, and the mystery of the love, which has intertwined the personal blessings which it celebrates, with its great designs for the welfare of the people, whose unique position corresponds to the unapproachable elevation of its God.

**II.** Verses 25 to 29 are prayer built on promise and winged by thankfulness. The whole of these verses are but the expansion of do as Thou hast said. But they are not vain repetitions. Rather they are the outpourings of wondering thankfulness and faith, that cannot turn away from dwelling on the miracle of mercy revealed to it unworthy. God delights in the sweet monotony and persistence of such reiterated prayers, each of which represents a fresh throb of desire and a renewed bliss in thinking of His goodness. Observe the frequency and variety of the divine names in these verses,--in each, one, at least: Jehovah God (v. 25); Jehovah of hosts (v. 26); Jehovah of hosts, God of Israel (v. 27); Lord Jehovah (vs. 28, 29). Strong love delights to speak the beloved name. Each fresh utterance of it is a fresh appeal to His revealed nature, and betokens another wave of blessedness passing over David's spirit as he thinks of God. Observe, also, the other repetition of Thy servant, which occurs in every verse, and twice in two of them. The king is never tired of realising his absolute subjection, and feels that it is dignity, and a blessed bond with God, that he should be His servant. The true purpose of honour and office bestowed by God is the service of God, and the name of servant is a plea with Him which He cannot but regard. Observe, too, how echoes of the promise ring all through these verses, especially the phrases establish the house and for ever. They show how profoundly David had been moved, and how he is labouring, as it were, to make himself familiar with the astonishing vista that has begun to open before his believing eyes. Well is it for us if we, in like manner, seek to fix our thoughts on the yet grander for ever disclosed to us, and if it colours all our look ahead, and makes the refrain of all our hopes and prayers.

But the main lesson of the prayer is that God's promise should ever be the basis and measure of prayer. The mould into which our petitions should run is, Do as Thou hast said. Because God's promise had come to David, therefore hath Thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto Thee. There is no presumption in taking God at His word. True prayer catches up the promises that have fallen from heaven, and sends them back again, as feathers to the arrows of its petitions. Nor does the promise make the prayer needless. We know that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us; and we know that we shall not receive the promised blessings, which are according to His will, unless we do ask. Let us seek to stretch our desires to the width of God's promises, and to confine our wishes within their bounds.