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

**2 SAMUEL-013. A LOYAL VOW by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint."*

*2 Samuel 15:15*

We stand here at the darkest hour of King David's life. Bowed down by the consciousness of his past sin, and recognising in the rebellion of his favourite son the divine chastisement, his early courage and buoyant daring seem to have ebbed from him wholly. He is forsaken by the mass of his subjects, he is preparing to abandon Jerusalem, and to flee as an exile, as he says himself so pathetically, whither I may. And at that moment of deepest depression there comes one little gleam of consolation and one piece of chivalrous devotion which brightens the whole story. His special retainers, apparently a bodyguard mostly of foreigners, rally round him. Mostly foreigners, I say, for these hard words Cherethites and Pelethites most probably mean inhabitants of the island of Crete, and Philistines. And as to six hundred of them, at all events, there can be no doubt, for they are expressly said to be men of Gath who followed after him. At all events, there was a little nucleus of men, not his own subjects, who determined to share his fate, whatever it was. And the words of my text are their words, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever the king shall appoint. Or, as the word stands in the original, in an abrupt, half-finished sentence, even more pathetic, According to all that my lord the king shall appoint, behold thy servants. These men were foreigners, not bound to render obedience to the king, but giving it because their hearts were touched. They were loyal amongst rebels, so many Abdiels, among the faithless, faithful only these, and they avowed their determination to cleave to the sovereign of their choice at a time when his back was at the wall, and their determination to follow him meant only peril and privation. They were filled with a passionate personal attachment to the king, and that personal attachment was ready to manifest itself as a willing sacrifice, as such love always is ready.

Now surely in all this there is a lesson for us. The heroism of men towards a man, the uncalculating devotion and magnificent self-sacrifice of which the poorest human soul is capable when touched to fine issues by some heart-love, are surely not all meant to be lavished on fellow-creatures, who, alas! generally receive the most of them. But these rude Philistines and Gittites, Goliath's fellow-townsmen, may preach to us Christians a lesson. Why should not we say as they said, According to all that my Lord the King shall appoint, behold Thy servants?

**I. So then, first, our King's will ought to be our will.**

The obedience that is promised in these words is not the obedience of action only, but it is the bowing down of the heart. And for us Christian men there is neither peace nor nobleness in our lives, except in the measure in which the will of Jesus Christ and our wills are accurately conterminous and identical. Wheresoever the two coincide, there is strength for us; wheresoever they diverge, there are weakness and certain ruin. These two wills ought to be like two of Euclid's triangles, or other geometric figures, the one laid upon the other, and each line and curve and angle accurately corresponding and coinciding, so that the two cover precisely the same ground.

Christ's will my will; that is religion. And you and I are Christians just in the measure in which that coincidence of wills is true about us, and not one hair's-breadth further, for all our professions. Wheresoever my will diverges from Christ, in that particular I am not His man; and Christian simply means Christ's man. I belong to Him when I think as He does, love as He does, will as He does, accept His commandment as the law of my life, His pattern as my example, His providence as sufficient and as good. Where we thus yield ourselves to Him, there we are strong, and so far, and only so far, have we a right to say that we are the King's servants at all.

This absolute submission we do render to one another when our hearts are touched; and the fact that men can and do give it--husbands to wives, wives to husbands, children to parents, friends to one another-- the fact that there is the capacity for that giving of one's self away, lodged deep in our nature, tells us what we are meant to do with it. Whose image and superscription hath it? Was it meant that we should thus live in slavish submission even to the dearest loved ones? Surely not; for that is the destruction of individuality. No, but it was meant that we should lay our wills down at Christ's feet and say, Not my will, but Thine, and Thine mine because I have made it mine by love. Then there is rest, and then we have solved the secret of the world, and are what our Lord would have us to be. Oh! do not our relations to our dear ones, with all that infinite power of self-sacrifice that our love brings with it, rebuke the partial extent of our surrender to our Master? and may we not be ashamed when we contrast the joy that we feel in giving up to those that we love, and the reluctance with which, too often, we obey the Master's commandments, and the long years of repining and murmuring before we submit, as we call it, which too often means accept His providences as inevitable, though not as welcome? To be ready to do whatsoever my Lord the King shall choose, believing that His choice is wisdom and kindness for us, and His commandments a blessing and a gift, is the attitude and temper for us all. Is there any other attitude to Jesus Christ which corresponds to our relation to Him, to what He has done for us, to what we say that He is to us? He has the right to us, because He has given us Himself. He asks nothing from us but that of which He has already set us the example. He gave Himself for us, as the Apostle says with emphasis that is often unnoticed. He gave Himself for us that He might purchase us for Himself. He who would possess another must impart Himself, and love, that yields a whole man to the loved one, only springs when the loved one mutually yields her whole heart. The King does not command from above, but He comes down amongst us, and He says, I gave Myself for thee; what givest thou to Me? O brethren, let us answer with that brave, chivalrous old Gittite:--As the Lord liveth, and as my Lord the King liveth, surely in what place my Lord the King shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will Thy servant be.

**II. Then notice again, still sticking to our story, that this yielding up of will, if it is worth anything, will become the more intense and fervent when surrounded by rebels.**

All Israel, with that poor feather-headed, vain Absalom, were on the one side, and David and these foreigners were on the other. Years of quiet uneventful life would never have brought out such magnificent heroism of devotion and self-surrender, as was crowded into that one moment of loyalty asserted in the face of triumphant rebels and traitors.

In like manner, the more Christ's reign is set at nought by the people about us, and the less they recognise the blessedness and the duty of submission to Him, the more strong and unmistakable should be the utterance of our loyalty. We should grasp His hand tighter by reason of the storms that may rage round about us. And if we dwell amongst those who, in any measure, deny or neglect His merciful dominion, let us see to it that we all the more hoist our colours at our doors, and stand by them when they are hoisted, that nobody may mistake under which King we serve.

You in your places of business, you young men in your warehouses, and all of us in our several spheres, have to come across many people who have no share in our loyalty and offer no allegiance to our King. That is the reason for intenser loyalty on our part. Never you mind what others say or do; do not take your orders from them. Better be with the handful that rally round David than with the crowds that run after Absalom! Better be amongst the few that are faithful than amongst the multitudes that depart! Dare to be singular, if it comes to that; and at all events remember that your relationship to your Master is a thing that concerns Him and you chiefly, and that you are not to take the pattern of your loyalty, nor the orders for your lives, from any lips but His own.

Hush all other voices that would command, and hush them that you may listen to Him. It is always difficult enough for Christian men to ascertain, in perplexed circumstances, the clear path of duty; but it is impossible if, along with His voice, we let the buzz of the crowd be audible in our ears. There is only one way by which we can hear what our Lord the King appoints, and that is by making a great stillness in our souls, and neither letting our own yelping inclinations give tongue, nor the babble of men round us, and their notions of life and of what is right, have influence upon us, but waiting to hear what God the Lord, speaking in Christ the King, has to say to us. And, remember, the more rebels there are, the more need for us to be conspicuously loyal to our King.

**III. Again, this complete yielding of ourselves in practical obedience and heart submission to command merits and providences is to be maintained, whatsoever it may lead to in the way of privation and difficulty.**

It was no holiday vow, made upon some parade day, that these brave foreigners were bringing to their king now, but it meant we are ready to suffer, starve, fight, lose everything, die if need be, to be true to thee. And the very thought of the impending danger elevated the men's consciousness, and made heroes out of very common people. And perhaps that is the best effect of our difficulties and sorrows, that they strike fire sometimes (if they are rightly accepted and used) out of what seems to be only dead, lumpish matter, and many a Christian shoots up into a stature of greatness and nobleness in his sorrow, who was but a very commonplace creature when all things went well with him. That is the kind of obedience that Christ delights to accept, obedience that is ready for anything, and does not wait to make sure that there is no danger of forfeiting a whole skin and a quiet life, before it vows itself to service. Are we only to be fair-weather Christians, or are we to be prepared for all the trials and sufferings that may befall us? A Christianity that does not bring any worldly penalties along with it is not worth much. Christians of Christ's pattern have generally to give up something for their Christianity. They give up nothing that it is not gain to lose, nothing that they are not better without, but they have to surrender much in which other people find great enjoyment, and which their weaker selves would delight in too. Are you ready, my brother, for that? Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. The old days of heroism and martyrdom are done with, as far as we are concerned, whatever may lie in the future. But do we make willingly and gladly the surrenders and the self-abnegations that are demanded by our loyalty to our Master? Have we ever learned to say about any line of action that our poor, lower nature grasps at, and our higher, enlightened by communion with Jesus Christ, forbids: So did not I because of the fear of the Lord? We can talk about following Christ's footsteps; do you think that if we had stood where these rude soldiers stood, or had anything as dark in prospect, as the price of our faithfulness to our King, as they had as the price of faithfulness to theirs, there would have rung from our lips the utterly sincere vow that sprang joyously from theirs: Behold Thy servants, ready to do whatever our Lord the King shall appoint?

**IV. A final thought, which travels beyond my text, is that such thorough-going obedience, irrespective of consequences, is the secret of all blessedness.**

Great peace have they which love Thy law': the peace of conscience; the peace of ceasing from that which is our worst enemy, self-will; the peace of self-surrender; the peace of feeling 'Tis His to command; tis mine to obey; the peace of casting the whole settling of the campaign on the King's shoulders, and of finding our duty restricted to tramping along with cheery heart on the path that He has appointed. That is worth having. Oh! if we could cease from self and lay our wills down before Him, then we should be quiet. The tranquil heart is the heart which has the law of Christ within it, and the true delight of life belongs to those who truly say, I delight to do Thy will. So yielding, so obeying, so submitting, so surrendering one's self, life becomes quiet, and strong, and sweet. And, if I might so turn the story that we have been considering, the faithful soldiers who have been true to the King when His throne was contested, will march with laurelled heads in His triumphant train when He comes back after His final and complete victory, and reign with Him in the true City of Peace, where His will shall be perfectly done by loving hearts, and all His servants shall be kings.