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

**2 SAMUEL-016. BARZILLAI by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"34. And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? 35. I am this day fourscore years old: and can I discern between good and evil! can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? 36. Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward? 37. Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother. But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee."*

*2 Samuel 19:34-37*

People often fancy that religion is only good to die by, and many exhortations are addressed to the young, founded on the possibility that an early death may be their lot. That, no doubt, is a very solemn consideration, but it is by no means the sole ground on which such an appeal may or should be rested. To some of you an early death is destined. To the larger number of you will be granted a life protracted to middle age, and to some of you silver hair will come, and you may see your children's children. I wish to win you seriously to look forward to the life on earth that is before you, and to the end to which it is likely to come, if you be spared in the world long enough.

The little picture in these verses is a very beautiful one. David had been fleeing from his rebellious Absalom, and his adversity had winnowed his friends. He had crossed the Jordan to the hill-country beyond, and there, while he was lurking with his crown in peril, and a price on his head, and old friends dropping from him in their eagerness to worship the rising sun, this Barzillai with others brought him seasonable help (17:23), When David returned victorious, Barzillai met him again. David offered to take him to Jerusalem and to set him in honour there, The old man answered in the words of our text.

Now I take them for the sake of the picture of old age which they give us. Look at them: the intellectual powers are dimmed, all taste for the pleasures and delights of sense is gone, ambition is dead, capacity for change is departed. What is left? This old man lives in the past and in the future; the early child-love of the father and mother who, eighty years ago, rejoiced over his cradle, remains fresh; he cannot any more hear the voice of the singing men and women, but he can hear the tones, clear over all these years, of the dear ones whom he first learned to love. The furthest past is fresh and vivid, and his heart and memory are true to it. Also he looks forward familiarly and calmly to the very near end, and lives with the thought of death. He keeps house with it now. It is nearer to him than the world of living men. In memory is half of his being, and in hope is the other half. All his hopes are now simplified and reduced to one, a hope to die and be united again with the dear ones whom he had so long remembered. And so he goes back to his city, and passes out of the record--an example of a green and good old age.

Now, young people, is not that picture one to touch your hearts? You think in your youthful flush of power and interest, that life will go on for ever as it has begun, and it is all but impossible to get you to look forward to what life must come to. I want you to learn from that picture of a calm, bright old age, a lesson or two of what life will certainly do to you, that I may found on these certainties the old, old appeal, Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth'.

**I. Life will gradually rob you of your interest in all earthly things.**

Your time of life is full of ebullient feeling, and sees freshness, glory, and beauty everywhere. Even the least enthusiastic men are enthusiastic in their early days. You have physical strength, the keenness of unpalled senses, the delights of new powers, the blessedness of mere living. All this springs partly from physical causes, partly from the novelty of your position. Thank God! all young creatures are happy, and you among the rest.

Now, I do not ask you to restrain and mortify these things. But I do ask you to remember the end. It is as certain that joys will pall, it is as certain that subjects of interest will be exhausted, it is as certain that powers will decay, as that they now are what they are. All these grave, middle-aged, careful people round you were like you once. You, if you live, will be like them. The spring tints are natural, but they are transient; the blossoms are not always on the fruit-trees.

Think, then, of the End: to make you thankful; to stimulate you; but also to lead you to take for your object what will never pall. All created things go. Only the gospel provides you with a theme which never becomes stale, with objects which are inexhaustible.

Here is a lesson for--

* Thinkers: Knowledge, it shall vanish away.
* Sensualists: Man delights me not, nor woman either. How old was he who said that?
* Ambitious, self-advancing men.

Is it worth your while to devote yourself to transient aims?

Is it congruous with your dignity as immortal souls?

Is it innocent or guilty?

Is the gospel not a thing to live by as well as to die by?

**II. Life will certainly rob you of the power to change.**

Barzillai knew that David's court was no place for him; he had been bred on the mountains of Gilead, and his habits suited only a simple country life. The court might be better, but he could not fit into it. But there was his boy Chimham; take him, he was young enough to bend and mould.

Now this is true in a far loftier way. I need not dwell on the universality of this law, how it applies to all manner of men, but I use it now in reference only to the gospel and your relation to it. You will never again be so likely to become a Christian, if you let these early days pass.

You say, I will have my fling, sow my wild oats, will wait a little longer, and then--and then what? You will find that it is infinitely harder to close with Christ than it would have been before.

* While you delay, you are stiffening into the habit of rejection. Custom is one of our mightiest friends or foes.
* While you delay, you are doing violence to conscience, and so weakening that to which the gospel appeals.
* While you delay, you are becoming more familiar with the unreceived message and so weakening the power of the gospel.
* While you delay, you are adding to the long list of your sins.
* While you delay, youth is slipping from you.

Make a mark with a straw on the clay and it abides; hammer on the brick with iron and it only breaks. Youth is a brief season. It is the season for forming habit, for receiving impression, for building up character. The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold, therefore shall he beg in harvest and have nothing. Your present time is seed time. God forbid that I should say that it is impossible, but I do say that it is hard, for a man to be born again when he is old.

If you do become Christ's servant later in life, your whole condition will be different from what it would have been if you had begun when young to trust and love Him. Think of the difficulty of rooting out habits and memories. Think of the horrid familiarity with evil. Think of the painful contrition for wasted years, which must be theirs who are hired at the eleventh hour, after standing all the day idle.

Contrast the experience of him who can say, I Thy servant fear God from my youth, who has been led by God's mercy from childhood in the narrow way, who by early faith in Christ has been kept in the slippery ways of youth.

Of the one we can but say, Is not this a brand plucked from the burning? The other is innocent of much transgression.

I have small hope of changing middle-aged and old men. To you I turn, you young men and women, you children, and to each of you I say, Wilt thou not from this time say, My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth?'

**III. Life will certainly deepen your early impressions.**

The old Barzillai dying looks back to his early days.

So I point the lesson: Keep thy heart with all diligence, and let your early thoughts be bright and pure ones.

Remember that you will never find any love like a father's and mother's. Don't do what will load your memories in after days with sharp reproaches.

**IV. Life will bring you nearer and nearer to the grave.**

Hope after hope dies out, and there is nothing left but the hope to die. How beautiful the facing of it so as to become calmly familiar with it, making it an object of hope, with bright visions of reunion!

How can such an old age so bright and beautiful be secured? Surely the one answer is,--by faith in Jesus Christ.

Think of an old Christian resting, full of years, full of memories, full of hopes, to whom the stir of the present is nothing, who has come so near the place where the river falls into the great sea that the sounds on the banks are unheard. It is calm above the cataract, and though there be a shock when the stream plunges over the precipice, yet a rainbow spans the fall, and the river peacefully mingles with the shoreless, boundless ocean.

Dear young friends, what shall the end be? It is for yourselves to settle. Oh, take Christ for your Lord! Then, though so far as regards the bodily life the youths shall faint and be weary, as regards the true self the life may be one of growing maturity, and at last you may come to the grave as a shock of corn that is fully ripe.

Trust, love, and serve Jesus, that thus calm, thus beautiful, may be your days here below, that if you die young you may die ripe enough for heaven, and that if God spares you to reverence and the silver hairs, you may crown a holy life by a peaceful departure, and, sitting in the antechamber of death, may not grieve for the departure of youth and strength and buoyancy and activity, knowing that they also serve who only stand and wait, and then may shake off the clog and hindrance of old age when you pass into the presence of God, and there, as being the latest-born of heaven, may more than renew your youth, and may enter on a life which weariness and decay never afflict, but with which immortal youth, with its prerogatives of endless hope, of keenest delight, of unwearying novelty, of boundless joy, abides for evermore.

[A Sermon preached to the Young.]