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

**2 THESSALONIANS-002**. **WORTHY OF YOUR CALLING by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"11. We pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power; 12. That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him."*

*2 Thessalonians 1:11-12*

In the former letter to the Church of Thessalonica, the Apostle had dwelt, in ever-memorable words--which sound like a prelude of the trump of God--on the coming of Christ at the end to judge the world, and to gather His servants into His rest. That great thought seems to have excited some of the hotter heads in Thessalonica, and to have led to a general feverishness of unwholesome expectancy of the near approach or actual dawn of the day. This letter is intended as a supplement to the former Epistle, and to damp down the fire which had been kindled. It, therefore, dwells with emphasis on the necessary preliminaries to the dawning of that day of the Lord, and throughout seeks to lead the excited spirits to patience and persistent work, and to calm their feverish expectations. This purpose colours the whole letter.

Another striking characteristic of it is the frequent gushes of short prayer for the Thessalonians with which the writer turns aside from the main current of his thoughts. In its brief compass there are four of these prayers, which, taken together, present many aspects of the Christian life, and hold out much for our hopes and much for our efforts. The prayer which I have read for our text is the first of these. The others, the consideration of which will follow on subsequent occasions, are these:--Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and stablish you in every good word and work. And, again, The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ. And, finally, summing up all, The Lord of peace Himself give you peace always, by all means. So full, so tender, so directed to the highest blessings, and to those only, are the wishes of a true Christian teacher, and of a true Christian friend, for those to whom He ministers and whom He loves. It is a poor love that cannot express itself in prayer. It is an earthly love which desires for its objects anything less than the highest of blessings.

**I. Notice, first, here, the divine test for Christian lives: We pray for you, that God would count you worthy of your calling.**

Now, it is to be observed that this counting worthy refers mainly to a future estimate to be made by God of the completed career and permanent character brought out of earth into another state by Christian souls. That is obvious from the whole strain of the letter, which I have already pointed out as mainly being concerned with the future coming to judgment of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is also, I think, made probable by the fact that the same expression, counting worthy, occurs in an earlier verse of this chapter, where the reference is exclusively to the future judgment.

So, then, we are brought face to face with this thought of an actual, stringent judgment which God will apply in the future to the lives and characters of professing Christians. Now, that is a great deal too much forgotten in our popular Christian teaching and in our average Christian faith. It is perfectly true that he who trusts in Jesus Christ will not come into condemnation, but has passed from death unto life. But it is just as true that judgment shall begin at the house of God, and that, the Lord will judge His people. And therefore, it becomes us to lay to heart this truth, that we, just because, if we are Christians, we stand nearest to God, are surest to be searched through and through by the light that streams from Him, and to have every flaw and corrupt speck and black spot brought out into startling prominence. Let no Christian man fancy that he shall escape the righteous judgment of God. The great doctrine of forgiveness does not mean that He suffers our sin to remain upon us unjudged, ay! or unavenged. But just as, day by day, there is an actual estimate in the divine mind, according to truth, of what we really are, so, at the last, God's servants will be gathered before His throne. They that have made a covenant with Him by sacrifice shall be assembled there--as the Psalm has it--that the Lord may judge His people.

Then, if the actual passing of a divine judgment day by day, and a future solemn act of judgment after we have done with earth, and our characters are completed, and our careers rounded into a whole, is to be looked for by Christians, what is the standard by which their worthiness is to be judged?

Your calling. The this of my text in the Authorised Version is a supplement, and a better supplement is that of the Revised Version, your calling. Now calling does not mean avocation or employment, as I perhaps need scarcely explain, but the divine fact of our having been summoned by Him to be His. Consider who calls. God Himself. Consider how He calls. By the Gospel, by Jesus Christ, or, as another apostle has it, by His own glory and virtue manifested in the world. That great voice which is in Jesus Christ, so tender, so searching, so heart-melting, so vibrating with the invitation of love and the yearning of a longing heart, summons or calls us. Consider, also, what this calling is to. God hath not called us to uncleanness, but to holiness, or, as this letter has it, in another part, unto salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. By all the subduing and animating and restraining and impelling tones in the sacrifice and life of Jesus Christ we are summoned to a life of self-crucifixion, of subjection of the flesh, of aspiration after God, of holy living according to the pattern that was showed us in Him. We are summoned here and now to a life of purity and righteousness and self-sacrifice. But also He hath called us to His everlasting kingdom and glory. That voice sounds from above now. From the Cross it said to us, I die that ye may live; from the throne it says to us, Live because I live, and come to live where I live. The same invitation, which calls us to a life of righteousness and self-suppression and purity, also calls us, with the sweet promise that is firm as the throne of God, to the everlasting felicities of that perfect kingdom in which, because the obedience is entire, the glory shall be untremulous and unstained. Therefore, considering who summons, by what He summons, and to what He calls us, do there not lie in the fact of that divine call to which we Christians say that we have yielded, the solemnest motives, the loftiest standard, the most stringent obligations for life? What sort of a life will that be which is worthy of that voice? Is yours? Is mine? Are there not the most flagrant examples of professing Christians, whose lives are in the most outrageous discordance with the lofty obligations and mighty motives of the summons which they profess to have obeyed? Worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called! Have I made my own the things which I am invited to possess? Have I yielded to the obligations which are enwrapped in that invitation? Does my life correspond to the divine purpose in calling me to be His? Can I say, Lord, Thou art mine, and I am Thine, and here my life witnesses to it, because self is banished from it, and I am full of God, and the life which I live in the flesh I live not to myself, but to Him that died for me?'

An absolute correspondence, a complete worthiness or perfect desert, is impossible for us all, but a worthiness which His merciful judgment who makes allowance for us all may accept, as not too flagrantly contradictory of what He meant us to be, is possible even for our poor attainments and our stained lives. If it were Paul's supreme prayer, should it not be our supreme aim, that we may be worthy of Him that hath called us, and walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called?

**II. Note, here, the divine help to meet the test.**

If it were a matter of our own effort alone, who of us could pretend to reach to the height of conformity with the great design of the loving Father in summoning us, or with the mighty powers that are set in motion by the summons for the purifying of men's lives? But here is the great characteristic and blessing of God's Gospel, that it not only summons us to holiness and to heaven, but reaches out a hand to help us thither. Therein it contrasts with all other voices--and many of them are noble and pathetic in their insistence and vehemence--which call men to lofty lives. Whether it be the voice of conscience, or of human ethics, or of the great ones, the elect of the race, who, in every age, have been as voices crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord--all these call us, but reach no hand out to draw us. They are all as voices from the heights and are of God, but they are voices only; they summon us to noble deeds, and leave us floundering in the mire.

But we have not a God who tells us to be good, and then watches to see if we will obey, but we have a God who, with all His summonses, brings to us the help to keep His commandments. Our God has more than a voice to enjoin, He has a hand to lift, Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt, said Augustine. There is the blessing and glory of the Gospel, that its summons has in it an impelling power which makes men able to be what it enjoins them to become. My text, therefore, follows the prayer that God would count you worthy, which contemplates God simply as judging men's correspondence with the ideal revealed in their calling, and is the cry of faith to the giving God, who works in us, if we will let Him, that which He enjoins on us. There are two directions of that divine working specified in the text. Paul asks that God would fulfil every desire of goodness and every work of faith, as the Revised Version renders the words. Two things, then, we may hope that God will do for us--He will fulfil every yearning after righteousness and purity in our hearts, and will perfect the active energy which faith puts forth in our lives.

Paul says, in effect, first, that God will fulfil every desire that longs for goodness. He is scarcely deserving of being called good who does not desire to be better. Aspiration must always be ahead of performance in a growing life, such as every Christian life ought to be. To long for any righteousness and beauty of goodness is, in some imperfect and incipient measure, to possess the good for which we long. This is the very signature of a Christian life--yearning after unaccomplished perfection. If you know nothing of that desire that stings and impels you onwards; if you do not know what it is to say, Oh! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? if you do not know what it is to follow the fair ideal realised in Jesus Christ with infinite longing, what right have you to call yourself a Christian? The very essence of the Christian life is yearning for completeness, and restlessness as long as sin has any power over us. We live not only by admiration, faith, and love, but we live by hope; and he who does not hunger and thirst after righteousness has yet to learn what are the first principles of the Gospel of Christ.

If there be not the desire after goodness, the restlessness and dissatisfaction with every present good, the brave ambition that says, Forgetting the things that are behind, I reach forth unto the things that are before, there is nothing in a man to which God's grace can attach itself. God cannot make you better if you do not wish to be better. There is no point upon which His hallowing and ennobling grace can lay hold in your hearts without such desire. Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it. If, as is too often the case with hosts of professing Christians, you shut your mouths tight and lock your teeth, how can God put any food between your lips? There must, first of all, be the aspiration, and then there will be the satisfaction.

I look out upon my congregation, or, better still, I look into my own heart, and I say, If I, if you, dear brethren, are not worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, we have not because we ask not. If there be no desire after goodness in our hearts, God cannot make us good. Our wishes are the mould into which the molten metal from the great furnace of His love will run. If we bring but a little vessel we cannot get a large supply. The manna lies round our tents; it is for us to determine how much we will gather.

And in like manner, says Paul, God will fulfil every work of faith. Our faith in Jesus Christ will naturally tend to influence our lives, and to manifest itself as a driving power which will set all the wheels of conduct in motion. Paul is quite sure that if we trust ourselves to God, all the beneficent and holy work that flows from such confidence will by Him be fully perfected.

God's fulfilment is to be done with power. That is to say, He will fit us to be worthy of our calling, He will answer our desires, He will give energy to our faith, and complete in number and in quality its operations in our lives, by reason of His dwelling with us and in us by that spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind which works all righteousness in believing hearts, and sheds divine beauty and goodness over character and life.

**III. Lastly, note the divine glory of the worthy.**

This fulfilment of every desire of goodness and work of faith is in order that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you and ye in Him.

Here, again, as in the first clause of our text, I take, in accordance with the prevailing tone of this letter, the reference to be mainly, though perhaps not exclusively, to a future transcendent glorifying of the name of Christ in perfected saints, and glorifying of perfected saints in Jesus Christ.

We have, then, set forth, first, as the result of the fulfilling of Christian men's desires after goodness, and the work of their faith, the glory that accrues to Christ from perfected saints. They are His workmanship. You remember the old story of the artist who went into a fellow-artist's studio and left upon the easel one complete circle, swept with one master-whirl of the brush. Jesus Christ presents perfected men to an admiring universe as specimens of what He can do. His highest work is the redeeming of poor creatures like you and me, and the making of us perfect in goodness and worthy of our calling. We are His chefs-d'oeuvre, the master work of the great divine artist.

Think, then, brethren, how, here and now, Christ's reputation is in our hands. Men judge of Him by us. The name of the Lord Jesus is glorified in you if you live worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, and people will think better of the Master if His disciples are faithful. Depend upon it, if we of this church, for instance, and the Christian people within these walls now, lived the lives that they ought to do, and manifested the power of the Gospel as they might, there would be many who would say, They have been with Jesus, and the Jesus that has made them what they are must be mighty and great. The best evidence of the power of the Gospel is your consistent lives.

Think, too, of that strange dignity that in the future, in manners and in regions all undiscernible by us, Christians, who have been made out of stones into children of God, will make known unto principalities and powers in heavenly places the wisdom and the love and the energy of the redeeming God. Who knows to what regions the commission of the perfected saints to make Christ known may carry them? Light travels far, and we cannot tell into what remote corners of the universe this may penetrate. This only we know, that they who shall be counted worthy to attain that life and the Resurrection from the dead shall bear the image of the heavenly, and perhaps to creations yet uncreated, and still to be evolved through the ages of eternity, it may be their part to carry the lustre of the light of the glory of God who redeemed and purified them.

On the other hand, there is glory accruing to perfected saints in Christ. And ye in Him. There will be a union so close as that nothing closer is possible, personality being preserved, between Christ and the saints above, who trust Him and love Him and serve Him there. And that union will lead to a participation in His glory which shall exalt their limited, stained, and fragmentary humanity into the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Astronomers tell us that dead, cold matter falls from all corners of the system into the sun, drawn by its magic magnetism from farthest space, and, plunging into that great reservoir of fire, the deadest and coldest matter glows with fervid heat and dazzling light. So you and I, dead, cold, dull, opaque, heavy fragments, drawn into mysterious oneness with Christ, the Sun of our souls, shall be transformed into His own image, and like Him be light and heat which shall radiate through the universe.

Brethren, meditate on your calling, the fact, its method, its aim, its obligations, and its powers. Cherish hopes and desires after goodness, the only hopes and desires that are certain to be fulfilled. Cultivate the life of faith working by love, and let us all live in the light of that solemn expectation that the Lord will judge His people. Then we may hope that the voice which summoned us will welcome us, and proclaim even of us, stained and undeserving as we rightly feel ourselves to be: They have not defiled their garments, therefore they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.