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

**GENESIS-007. THE COURSE AND CROWN OF A DEVOUT LIFE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him."*

*Genesis 5:24*

This notice of Enoch occurs in the course of a catalogue of the descendants of Adam, from the Creation to the Deluge. It is evidently a very ancient document, and is constructed on a remarkable plan. The formula for each man is the same. So-and-so lived, begat his heir, the next in the series, lived on after that so many years, having anonymous children, lived altogether so long, and then died. The chief thing about each life is the birth of the successor, and each man's career is in broad outline the same. A dreary monotony runs through the ages. How brief and uniform may be the records of lives of striving and tears and smiles and love that stretched through centuries! Nine hundred years shrink into less than as many lines.

The solemn monotony is broken in the case of Enoch. This paragraph begins as usual--he lived; but afterwards, instead of that word, we read that he walked with God--happy they for whom such a phrase is equivalent to live--and, instead of died, it is said of him that he was not. That seems to imply that he, as it were, slipped out of sight or suddenly disappeared; as one of the psalms says, I looked, and lo! he was not. He was there a moment ago--now he is gone; and my text tells how that sudden withdrawal came about. God, with whom he walked, put out His hand and took him to Himself. Of course. What other end could there be to a life that was all passed in communion with God except that apotheosis and crown of it all, the lifting of the man into closer communion with his Father and his Friend?

So, then, there are just these two things here--the noblest life and its crown.

**I. The noblest life.**

He walked with God. That is all. There is no need to tell what he did or tried to do, how he sorrowed or joyed, what were his circumstances. These may all fade from men's knowledge as they have somewhat faded from his memory up yonder. It is enough that he walked with God.

Of course, we have here, underlying the phrase, the familiar comparison of life to a journey, with all its suggestions of constant change and constant effort, and with the suggestion, too, that each life should be a progress directly tending to one clearly recognised goal. But passing from that, let us just think for a moment of the characteristics which must go to make up a life of which we can say that it is walking with God. The first of these clearly is the one that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews puts his finger upon, when he makes faith the spring of Enoch's career. The first requisite to true communion with God is vigorous exercise of that faculty by which we realise the fact of His presence with us; and that not as a jealous-eyed inspector, from whose scrutiny we would fain escape, but as a companion and friend to whom we can cleave. He that cometh to God, and walks with God, must first of all believe that He is; and passing by all the fascinations of things seen, and rising above all the temptations of things temporal, his realising eye must fix upon the divine Father and see Him nearer and more clearly than these. You cannot walk with God unless you are emancipated from the dominion of sense and time, and are living by the power of that great faculty, which lays hold of the things that are unseen as the realities, and smiles at the false and forged pretensions of material things to be the real. We have to invert the teaching of the world and of our senses. My fingers and my eyes and my ears tell me that this gross, material universe about me is the real, and that all beyond it is shadowy and (sometimes we think) doubtful, or, at any rate, dim and far off. But that is false, and the truth is precisely the other way. The Unseen is the Real, and the Material is the merely Apparent. Behind all visible objects, and giving them all their reality, lies the unchangeable God.

Cultivate the faculty and habit of vigorous faith, if you would walk with God. For the world will put its bandages over your eyes, and try to tempt you to believe that these poor, shabby illusions are the precious things; and we have to shake ourselves free from its harlot kisses and its glozing lies, by very vigorous and continual efforts of the will and of the understanding, if we are to make real to ourselves that which is real, the presence of our God.

Besides this vigorous exercise of the faculty of faith, there is another requisite for a walk with God, closely connected with it, and yet capable of being looked at separately, and that is, that we shall keep up the habit of continual occupation of thought with Him. That is very much an affair of habit with Christian people, and I am afraid that the neglect of it is the habitual practice of the bulk of professing Christians nowadays. It is hard, amidst all our work and thought and joys and sorrows, to keep fresh our consciousness of His presence, and to talk with Him in the midst of the rush of business. But what do we do about our dear ones when we are away from them? The measure of our love of them is accurately represented by the frequency of our remembrances of them. The mother parted from her child, the husband and the wife separated from one another, the lover and the friend, think of each other a thousand times a day. Whenever the spring is taken off, then the natural bent of the inclination and heart assert themselves, and the mind goes back again, as into a sanctuary, into the sweet thought. Is that how we do with God? Do we so walk with Him, as that thought, when released, instinctively sets in that direction? When I take off the break, does my spirit turn to God? If there is no hand at the helm, does the bow always point that way? When the magnet is withdrawn for a moment, does the needle tremble back and settle itself northwards? If we are walking with God, we shall, more times a day than we can count when the evening comes on, have had the thought of Him coming into our hearts like some sweet beguiling melody, so sweet we know not we are listening to it. Thus we shall walk with God.

Then there is another requisite. How can two walk together except they be agreed? He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk even as He walked. There is no union with God in such communion possible, unless there be a union with Him by conformity of will and submission of effort and aim to His commandments. Well, then, is that life possible for us? Look at this instance before us. We know very little about how much knowledge of God these people in old days had, but, at all events, it was a great deal less than you and I have. Their theology was very different from ours; their religion was absolutely identical with ours. Their faith, which grasped the God revealed in their creed, was the same as our faith, though the creed which their faith grasped was only an outline sketch of yours and mine. But at all times and in all generations, the element and essence of the religious life has been the same-that is, the realising sense of the living divine presence, the effort and aspiration after communion with Him, and the quiet obedience and conformity of the practical life to His will. And so we can reach out our hands across all the centuries to this pre-Noachian, antediluvian patriarch, dim amongst the mists, and feel that he too is our brother.

And he has set us the example that in all conditions of life, and under the most unfavourable circumstances, it is possible to live in this close touch with God. For in his time, not only was there, as I have said, an incomplete and rudimentary knowledge of God, but in his time the earth was filled with violence, and gigantic forms of evil are represented as having dominated mankind. Amidst it all, the Titanic pride, the godlessness, the scorn, the rudeness, and the violence, amidst it all, this one white flower of a blameless life managed to find nutriment upon the dunghill, and to blossom fresh and fair there. You and I cannot, whatever may be our hindrances in living a consistent Christian life, have anything like the difficulties that this man had and surmounted. For us all, whatever our conditions, such a life is possible.

And then there is another lesson that he teaches us, viz. that such a life is consistent with the completest discharge of all common duties. The outline, as far as appearance was concerned, of this man's life was the same as the outline of those of his ancestors and successors. They are all described in the same terms. The formula is the same. Enoch lived, Mahalaleel, and all the rest of the half-unpronounceable names, they lived, they begat their heirs, and sons and daughters, and then they died. And the same formula is used about this man. He walked with God, but it was while treading the common path of secular life that he did so.

He found it possible to live in communion with God, and yet to do all the common things that men did then. Anybody's house may be a Bethel--a house of God--and anybody's work may be worship; and wherever we are and whatever we do, it is possible therein to serve God, and there to walk with Him.

**II. And now a word about the crown of this life of communion. He was not, for God took him'**

What wonderful reticence in describing, or rather hinting at, the stupendous miracle that is here in question! Is that like a book that came from the legend-loving and legend-making brains of men; or does it sound like the speech of God, to whom nothing is extraordinary and nothing needs to have a mark of admiration after it? It was the same to Him whether Enoch died or whether He simply took him to Himself. If one wants to know what men would have made of such a thing, if they had had to tell it, let them read those wretched Rabbinical fables that have been stitched on to this verse. There they will see how men describe miracles; and here they will see how God does so.

He was not. As I have said, he disappeared; that was what the world knew. God took him; that was what God tells the world.

Thus this strange exception to the law of death stood, as I suppose, to the ancient world as doing somewhat the same office for them that the translation of Elijah afterwards partially did for Israel, and that the resurrection of Jesus Christ does completely for us, viz. it brought the future life into the realm of fact, and took it out of the dim region of speculation altogether. He establishes a truth who proves it, and he proves a fact that shows it. A doctrine of a future state is not worth much, but the fact of a future state, which was established by this incident then, and is certified for us all now, by the Christ risen from the dead, is all-important. Our gospel is all built upon facts, and this is the earliest fact in man's history which made man's subsistence in other conditions than that of earthly life a certainty.

And then, again, this wonderful exception shows to us, as it did to that ancient world, that the natural end of a religious life is union with God hereafter. It seems to me that the real proofs of a future life are two: one, the fact of Christ's resurrection, and the other, the fact of our religious experience. For anything looks to me more likely, and less incredible, than that a man who could walk with God should only have a poor earthly life to do it in, and that all these aspirations, these emotions, should be bounded and ended by a trivial thing, that touches only the physical frame. Surely, surely, there is nothing so absurd as to believe that he who can say Thou art my God, and who has said it, should ever by anything be brought to cease to say it. Death cannot kill love to God; and the only end of the religious life of earth is its perfecting in heaven. The experiences that we have here, in their loftiness and in their incompleteness, equally witness for us, of the rest and the perfectness that remain for the children of God.

Then, again, this man in his unique experience was, and is, a witness of the fact that death is an excrescence, and results from sin. I suppose that he trod the road which the divine intention had destined to be trodden by all the children of men, if they had not sinned; and that his experience, unique as it is, is a survival, so to speak, of what was meant to be the law for humanity, unless there had intervened the terrible fact of sin and its wages, death. The road had been made, and this one man was allowed to travel along it that we might all learn, by the example of the exception, that the rule under which we live was not the rule that God originally meant for us, and that death has resulted from the fact of transgression. No doubt Enoch had in him the seeds of it, no doubt there were the possibilities of disease and the necessity of death in his physical frame, but God has shown us in that one instance, and in the other of the great prophet's, how He is not subject to the law that men shall die, although men are subject to it, and that if He will, He can take them all to Himself, as He did take these two, and will take them who, at last, shall not die but be changed.

Let me remind you that this unique and exceptional end of a life of communion may, in its deepest, essential character, be experienced by each of us. There are two passages in the book of Psalms, both of which I regard as allusions to this incident. The one of them is in the forty-ninth Psalm and reads thus: He will deliver my soul from the power of the grave, for He will take me. Our version conceals the allusion, by its unfortunate and non-literal rendering receive. The same word is employed there as here. Can we fail to see the reference? The Psalmist expects his soul to be delivered from the power of the grave, because God takes it.

And again, in the great seventy-third Psalm, which marks perhaps the highwater mark of pre-Christian anticipations of a future state, we read: Thou wilt guide me by Thy counsel, and afterwards take me (again the same word) to glory. Here, again, the Psalmist looks back to the unique and exceptional instance, and in the rapture and ecstasy of the faith that has grasped the living God as his portion, says to himself: Though the externals of Enoch's end and of mine may differ, their substance will be the same, and I, too, shall cease to be seen of men, because God takes me into the secret of His pavilion, by the loving clasp of His lifting hand.

Enoch was led, if I may say so, round the top of the valley, beyond the head waters of the dark river, and was kept on the high level until he got to the other side. You and I have to go down the hill, out of the sunshine, in among the dank weeds, to stumble over the black rocks, and wade through the deep water; but we shall get over to the same place where he stands, and He that took him round by the top will take us through the river; and so shall we ever be with the Lord'

Enoch walked with God and he was not; for God took him. This verse is like some little spring with trees and flowers on a cliff. The dry genealogical table--and here this bit of human life in it! How unlike the others--they lived and they died; this man's life was walking with God and his departure was a fading away, a ceasing to be found here. It is remarkable in how calm a tone the Bible speaks of its supernatural events. We should not have known this to be a miracle but for the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The dim past of these early chapters carries us over many centuries. We know next to nothing about the men, where they lived, how they lived, what thoughts they had, what tongue they spoke. Some people would say that they never lived at all. I believe, and most of you, I suppose, believe that they did. But how little personality we give them! Little as we know of environment and circumstances, we know the main thing, the fact of their having been. Then we are sure that they had sorrow and joy, strife and love, toil and rest, like the rest of us, that whether their days were longer or shorter they were filled much as ours are, that whatever was the pattern into which the quiet threads of their life was woven it was, warp and weft, the same yarn as ours. In broad features every human life is much the same. Widely different as the clothing of these grey fathers in their tents, with their simple contrivances and brief records, is from that of cultivated busy Englishmen to-day, the same human form is beneath both. And further, we know but little as to their religious ideas, how far they were surrounded with miracles, what they knew of God and of His purposes, how they received their knowledge, what served them for a Bible. Of what positive institutions of religion they had we know nothing; whether for them there was sacrifice and a sabbath day, how far the original gospel to Adam was known or remembered or understood by them. All that is perfectly dark to us. But this we know, that those of them who were godly men lived by the same power by which godly men live nowadays. Whatever their creed, their religion was ours. Religion, the bond that unites again the soul to God, has always been the same.