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

**HABAKKUK-001. THE IDEAL DEVOUT LIFE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"The Lord God is my Strength, and He will make my feet like hinds feet, and He will make me to walk upon mine high places."*

*Habakkuk 3:19*

So ends one of the most magnificent pieces of imaginative poetry in Scripture or anywhere else. The singer has been describing a great delivering manifestation of the Most High God, which, though he knew it was for the deliverance of God's people, shed awe and terror over his soul. Then he gathers himself together to vow that in this God, thus manifested as the God of his salvation, he will rejoice, whatever penury or privation may attach to his outward life. Lastly, he rises, in these final words, to the apprehension of what this God, thus rejoiced in, will become to those who so put their trust and their gladness upon Himself.

The expressions are of a highly metaphorical and imaginative character, but they admit of being brought down to very plain facts, and they tell us the results in heart and mind of true faith and communion with God.

It is to be noticed that a parallel saying, almost verbatim the same as that of my text, occurs in the 18th psalm, and that there, too, it is the last and joyous result of a tremendous manifestation of the delivering energy of God.

Without any attempt to do more than bring out the deep meaning of the words, I note that the three clauses of our text present three aspects of what our lives and ourselves may steadfastly be if we, too, will rejoice in the God of our salvation.

**I. First, such communion with God brings God to a man for his strength.**

The 18th psalm, which is closely parallel, as I have remarked, with this one, gives a somewhat different and inferior version of that thought when it says, It is the Lord that girdeth me with strength. But Habakkuk, though perhaps he could not have put into dogmatic shape all that he meant, had come farther than that with this: The Lord is my strength. He not only gives, as one might put a coin into the hand of a beggar, while standing separate from him all the while, but He is my strength.

And what does that mean? It is an anticipation of that most wonderful and highest of all the New Testament truths which the Apostle declared when he said: I can do all things in Christ which strengtheneth me within. It is the anticipation in experience--which always comes before dogmatic formulas that reduce experiences into articulate utterances, of what the Apostle recorded when he said that he had heard the voice that declared, My grace is sufficient for thee, and My strength is made perfect in weakness.

Ah, brother! do not let us deprive ourselves of the lofty consolations and the mysterious influx of power which may be ours, if we will open our eyes to see, and our hearts to receive, what is really the central blessing of the Gospel, the communication through the same faith as Habakkuk exercised when he said, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation, of an actual divine strength to dwell in and manifest itself majestically and triumphantly through, our weakness. The Lord is my strength, and if we will rejoice in the Lord we shall find that Habakkuk's experience was lower than ours, inasmuch as he knew less of God than we do; and we shall be able to surpass his saying with the other one of the Prophet: The Lord is my strength and song; He also is become my salvation. That is the first blessing that this ancient believer, out of the twilight of early revelation, felt as certain to come through communion with God.

**II. The second is like unto it. Such rejoicing communion with God will give light-footedness in the path of life.**

He makes my feet like hinds feet. The stag is, in all languages spoken by people that have ever seen it, the very type and emblem of elastic, springing ease, of light and bounding gracefulness, that clears every obstacle, and sweeps swiftly over the moor. And when this singer, or his brother psalmist in the other psalm that we have referred to, says, Thou makest my feet like hinds feet, what he is thinking about is that light and easy, springing, elastic gait, that swiftness of advance. What a contrast that is to the way in which most of us get through our day's work! Plod, plod, plod, in a heavy-footed, spiritless grind, like that with which the ploughman toils down the sticky furrows of a field, with a pound of clay at each heel; or like that with which a man goes wearied home from his work at night. The monotony of trivial, constantly recurring doings, the fluctuations in the thermometer of our own spirits; the stiff bits of road that we have all to encounter sooner or later; and as days go on, our diminishing buoyancy of nature, and the love of walking a little slower than we used to do; we all know these things, and our gait is affected by them. But then my text brings a bright assurance, that swift and easy and springing as the course of a stag on a free hill-side may be the gait with which we run the race set before us.

It is the same thought, under a somewhat different garb, which the Apostle has when he tells us that the Christian soldier ought to have his feet shod with the alacrity that comes from the gospel of peace. We are to be always ready to run, and to run with light hearts when we do. That is a possible result of Christian communion, and ought, far more than it is, to be an achieved reality with each of us. Of course physical conditions vary. Of course our spirits go up and down. Of course the work that we have to do one day seems easier than the same work does another. All these fluctuations and variations, and causes of heavy-footedness--and sometimes more sinful ones, causes of sluggishness--will survive; but in spite of them all, and beneath them all, it is possible that we may have ourselves thus equipped for the road, and may rejoice in our work as a strong man to run a race, and may cheerily welcome every duty, and cast ourselves into all our tasks. It is possible, because communion with God manifest in Christ does, as we have been seeing, actually breathe into men a vigour, and consequently a freshness and a buoyancy that do not belong to themselves, and do not come from nature or from surrounding things. Unless that is true, that Christianity gives to a man the divine gladness which makes him ready for work, I do not know what is the good of his Christianity to him.

But not only is that so, but this same communion with God, which is the opening of the heart for the influx of the divine power, brings to bear upon all our work new motives which redeem it from being oppressive, tedious, monotonous, trivial, too great for our endurance, or too little for our effort. All work that is not done in fellowship with Jesus Christ tends to become either too heavy to be tackled successfully, or too trivial to demand our best energies, and in either case will be done perfunctorily, and as the days go on, mechanically and wearisomely, as a grind and a pled. Thou makest my feet like hinds feet--if I get the new motive of love to God in Christ well into my heart so that it comes out and influences all my actions, there will be no more tasks too formidable to undertake, or too small to be worth an effort. There will be nothing unwelcome. The rough places will be made plain, and the crooked things straight, and our feet will be shod with the preparedness of the gospel of peace.

If we live in daily communion with God, another thought, too, will come in, which will, in like manner, make us ready to run with cheerfulness the race that is set before us. We shall connect everything that befalls us, and everything that we have to do, with the final issue, and life will become solemn, grave, and blessed, because it is the outer court and vestibule of the eternal life with God in Christ. They that hold communion with Him, and only they, will, as another prophet says, run and not be weary, when there come the moments that require a special effort; and will walk and not faint through the else tediously long hours of commonplace duty and dusty road.

**III. The last of the thoughts here is--Communion with God brings elevation.**

He will make me to walk upon my high places. One sees the herd on the skyline of the mountain ridge, and at home up there, far above dangers and attack; able to keep their footing on cliff and precipice, and tossing their antlers in the pure air. One wave of the hand, and they are miles away. He sets me upon my high places; if we will keep ourselves in simple, loving fellowship with God in Christ; and day by day, even when the fig-tree does not blossom, and there is no fruit in the vine, will still rejoice in the God of our salvation, He will lift us up, and Isaiah's other clause in the verse which I have quoted will be fulfilled: They shall mount up with wings as eagles. Communion with God does not only help us to plod and to travel, but it helps us to soar. If we keep ourselves in touch with Him, we shall be like a weight that is hung on to a balloon. The buoyancy of the one will lift the leadenness of the other. If we hold fast by Christ's hand that will lift us up to the high places, the heights of God, in so far as we may reach them in this world; and we shall be at home up there. They will be my high places, that I never could have got at by my own scrambling, but to which Thou hast lifted me up, and which, by Thy grace, have become my natural abode. I am at home there, and walk at liberty in the loftiness, and fear no fall amongst the cliffs.

Are you and I familiar with these upper ranges of thought and experience and life? Do we feel at home there more than down in the bottoms, amongst the swamps, and the miasma, and the mists? Where is your home, brother? The Mass begins with Sursum corda: Up with your hearts, and that is the word for us. But the way to get up is to keep ourselves in touch with Jesus Christ, and then He will, even whilst our feet are travelling along this road of earth, set us at His own right hand in the heavenly places, and make them our high places. It is safe up there. The air is pure; the poison mists are down lower; the hunters do not come there; their arrows or their rifles will not carry so far. It is only when the herd ventures a little down the hill that it is in danger from shots.

But the elevation will not be such as to make us despise the low paths on which duty--the sufficient and loftiest thing of all--lies for us. Our souls may be like stars, and dwell apart, and yet may lay the humblest duties upon themselves, and whilst we live in the high places, we may travel on life's common way in cheerful godliness. Communion with Him will make us light-footed, and lift us high, and yet it will keep us at desk, and mill, and study, and kitchen, and nursery, and shop, and we shall find that the high places are reachable in every life, and in every task. So we may go on until at last we shall hear the Voice that says, Come up higher, and shall he lifted to the mountain of God, where the living waters are, and shall fear no snares or hunters any more for ever.