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

**ISAIAH-048. THE SECRET OF IMMORTAL YOUTH by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint."*

*Isaiah 40:30-31*

I remember a sunset at sea, where the bosom of each wavelet that fronted the west was aglow with fiery gold, and the back of each turned eastward was cold green; so that, looking on the one hand all was glory, and on the other all was sober melancholy. So differently does life look to you young people and to us older ones. Every man must buy his own experience for himself, and no preaching nor talking will ever make you see life as we see it. It is neither possible nor desirable that you should; but it is both possible and most desirable that you should open your eyes to plain, grave facts, which do not at all depend on our way of looking at things, and that if they be ascertainable, as they are, you should let them shape your lives.

Here are a couple of facts in my text which I ask you to look steadily in the face, and to take account of them, because, if you do so now, it may save you an immense deal of disappointment and sorrow in the days that are to come. You have the priceless prerogative still in your hands of determining what that future is to be; but you will never use that power rightly if you are guided by illusions, or if, unguided by anything but inclination, you let things drift, and do as you like.

So, then, my object is simply to deal with these two forecasts which my text presents; the one a dreary certainty of weariness and decay, the other a blessed possibility of inexhaustible and incorruptible strength and youth, and on the contrast to build as earnest an appeal to you as I can make.

**I. Now, then, look at the first fact here, that of the dreary certainty of weariness and decay.**

I do not need to spend much time in talking about that. It is one of the commonplaces which are so familiar that they have lost all power of impression, and can only be rescued from their trivial insignificance by being brought into immediate connection with our own experience. If, instead of the toothless generality, the youths shall faint and be weary, I could get you young people to say, I--I shall faint and be weary, and, as sure as I am living, I shall lose what makes to me the very joy of life at this moment, I should not have preached in vain.

Of course the words of my text point to the plain fact that all created and physical life, by the very law of its being, in the act of living tends to death; and by the very operation of its strength tends to exhaustion. There are three stages in every creature's life--that of growth, that of equilibrium, that of decay. You are in the first. If you live, it is as certain as fate that you will come to the second and the third. Your eyes will grow dim, your natural force will be abated, your body will become a burden, your years that are full of buoyancy will be changed for years of heaviness and weariness, strength will decay, and the young men--that is you--shall utterly fall.

And the text points also to another fact, that, long before your natural life shall have begun to tend towards decay, hard work and occasional sorrows and responsibilities and burdens of all sorts will very often make you wearied and ready to faint. In your early days you dream of life as a kind of enchanted garden, full of all manner of delights; and you stand at the threshold with eager eyes and outstretched hands. Ah! dear young friend, long before you have traversed the length of one of its walks, you will often have been sick and tired of the whole thing, and weary of what is laid upon you.

My text points to another fact, as certain as gravitation, that the faintness and weariness and decay of the bodily strength will be accompanied with a parallel change in your feelings. We are drawn onward by hopes, and when we get them fulfilled we find that they are disappointing. Custom, which weighs upon us heavy as frost, and deep almost as life, takes the edge off everything that is delightsome, though it does not so completely take away the pain of things that are burdensome and painful. Men travel from a tinted morning into the sober light of common day, and with failing faculties and shattered illusions and dissipated hopes, and powers bending under the long monotony of middle life, most of them live. Now all that is the veriest threadbare morality, and I dare say while I have been speaking, some of you have been thinking that I am repeating platitudes that every old woman could preach. So I am. That is to say, I am trying to put into feeble words the universal human experience. That is your experience, and what I want to get you to think about now is that, as sure as you are living and rejoicing in your youth and strength, this is the fate that is awaiting you--the youths shall faint and be weary, and shall utterly fall.

Well, then, one question: Do you not think that, if that is so, it would be as well to face it? Do you not think that a wise man would take account of all the elements in forecasting his life and would shape his conduct accordingly? If there be something certain to come, it is a very questionable piece of wisdom to make that the thing which we are most unwilling to think about. I do not want to be a kill-joy; I do not want to take anything out of the happy buoyancy of youth. I would say, as even that cynical, bitter Ecclesiastes says, Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth. By all means; only take all the facts into account, and if you have joys which shrivel up at the touch of this thought, then the sooner you get rid of such joys the better. If your gladness depends upon your forcibly shutting your eyes to what is inevitably certain to come about, do you not think that you are living in a fool's paradise that you had better get out of as soon as possible? There is the fact. Will you be a wise and brave man and front it, and settle how you are going to deal with it, or will you let it hang there on your horizon, a thunder-cloud that you do not like to look at, and that you are all the more unwilling to entertain the thought of, because you are so sure that it will burst in storm? Lay this, then, to heart, though it is a dreary certainty, that weariness and decay are sure to be your fate.

**II. Now turn, in the next place, to the blessed opposite possibility of inexhaustible and immortal strength.**

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. The life of nature tends inevitably downward, but there may be another life within the life of nature, which shall have the opposite motion, and tend as certainly upwards. The youths shall faint and be weary--whether they be Christians or not, the law of decay and fatigue will act upon them; but there may be that within each of us, if we will, which shall resist that law, and have no proclivity whatsoever to extinction in its blaze, to death in its life, to weariness in its effort, and shall be replenished and not exhausted by expenditure. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, and, in all forms of motion possible to a creature they shall expatiate and never tire. So let us look on this blessed possibility a little more closely.

Note, then, how to get at it. They that wait upon the Lord is Old Testament dialect for what in New Testament phraseology is meant by Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. For the notion expressed here by waiting is that of expectant dependence, and the New Testament faith is the very same in its attitude of expectant dependence, while the object of the Old Testament waiting, Jehovah, is identical with the object of the New Testament faith, which fastens on God manifest in the flesh, the Man Jesus Christ.

Therefore, I am not diverting the language of my text from its true meaning, but simply opening its depth, when I say that the condition of the inflow of this unwearied and immortal life into our poor, fainting, dying humanity is simply the trust in Jesus Christ the Redeemer of our souls. True, the revelation has advanced; the contents of that which we grasp are more developed and articulate, blessed be God! True, we know more about Jehovah, when we see Him in Jesus Christ, than Isaiah did. True, we have to trust in Him as dying on the Cross for our salvation and as the pattern and example in His humanity of all nobleness and beauty of life for young or old, but the Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. And the faith that knit the furthest back of the saints of old to the Jehovah, whom they dimly knew, is in essence identical with the faith that binds my poor sinful heart to the Christ that died and that lives for my redemption and salvation. So, dear brethren, here is the simple old message for each of you, young or old. No matter where we stand on the course of life, there may come into our hearts a Divine Indweller, who laughs at weariness and knows nothing of decay; and He will come if, as sinful men, we turn ourselves to that dear Lord, who fainted and was weary many a time in His humanity, and who now lives, the strong Son of God, immortal love, to make us partakers in His immortality and His strength. The way, then, by which we get this divine gift is by faith in Jesus Christ, which is the expansion, as it was the root, of trust in Jehovah.

Further, what is this strength that we thus get, if we will, by faith? It is the true entrance into our souls of a divine life. God in His Son will come to us, according to His own gracious and profound promise: If any man open the door I will enter in. He will come into our hearts and abide there. He will give to us a life derived from, and therefore, kindred with, His own. And in that connection it is very striking to notice how the prophet, in the context, reiterates these two words, fainteth not, neither is weary. He begins by speaking of God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, who fainteth not, neither is weary. He passes on to speak of His gift of power to the faint. He returns to the contrast between the Creator's incorruptible strength and the fleeting power of the strongest and youngest. And then he crowns all with the thought that the same characteristics will mark them in whom the unwearied God dwells, as mark Him. We too, like Him, if we have Christ in our hearts by faith, will share, in some fashion and degree, in His wondrous prerogative of unwearied strength.

So, brethren, here is the promise. God will give Himself to you, and in the very heart of your decaying nature will plant the seed of an immortal being which shall, like His own, shake off fatigue from the limbs, and never tend to dissolution or an end. The life of nature dies by living; the life of grace, which may belong to us all, lives by living, and lives evermore thereby. And so that life is continuous and progressive, with no tendency to decay, nor term to its being. The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more, until it riseth to the zenith of the noontide of the day. Each of you, looking forward to the certain ebbing away of creatural power, to the certain changes that will pass upon you, may say, I know that I shall have to leave behind me my present youthful strength, my unworn freshness, my buoyancy, my confidence, my wonder, my hope; but I shall carry my Christ; and in Him I shall possess the secret of an immortal youth.

The oldest angels are the youngest. The longer men live in fellowship with Christ, the stronger do they grow. And though our lives, whether we are Christians or no, are necessarily subject to the common laws of mortality, we may carry all that is worth preserving of the earliest stages into the latest; and when grey hairs are upon us, and we are living next door to our graves, we may still have the enthusiasm, the energy, and above all, the boundless hopefulness that made the gladness and the spring of our long-buried youth. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age. The youths shall faint and be weary, but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.

There is one more point to touch, and then I have done, and that is the manner in which this immortal strength is exercised. The latter clauses of my text give us, so to speak, three forms of motion. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. Some good commentators find in this a parallel to the words in the 103rd Psalm, My youth is renewed like the eagle's, and propose to translate it in this fashion, They shall cast their plumage like the eagle. But it seems much more in accordance with the context and the language to adopt substantially the reading of our English version here, or to make the slight change, They shall lift up their wings as the eagle, implying, of course, the steady upward flight towards the light of heaven.

So, then, there are three forms of unwearied strength lying ready for you, young men and women, to take for your very own if you like: strength to soar, strength to run, strength to walk.

There is strength to soar. Old men generally shed their wings, and can only manage to crawl. They have done with romance. Enthusiasms are dead. Sometimes they cynically smile at their own past selves and their dreams. And it is a bad sign when an old man does that. But for the most part they are content, unless they have got Christ in their hearts, to keep along the low levels, and their soaring days are done. But if you and I have Jesus Christ for the life of our spirits, as certainly as fire sends its shooting tongues upwards, so certainly shall we rise above the sorrows and sins and cares of this dim spot which men call earth, and find an ampler field for buoyant motion high up in communion with God. Strength to soar means the gracious power of bringing all heaven into our grasp, and setting our affections on things above. As the night falls, and joys become fewer and life sterner, and hopes become rarer and more doubtful, it is something to feel that, however straitened may be the ground below, there is plenty of room above, and that, though we are strangers upon earth, we can lift our thoughts yonder. If there be darkness here, still we can outsoar the shadow of our night, and live close to the sun in fellowship with God. Dear brethren, life on earth were too wretched unless it were possible to mount up with wings as eagles.

Again, you may have strength to run--that is to say, there is power waiting for you for all the great crises of your lives which call for special, though it may be brief, exertion. Such crises will come to each of you, in sorrow, work, difficulty, hard conflicts. Moments will be sprung upon you without warning, in which you will feel that years hang on the issue of an instant. Great tasks will be clashed down before you unexpectedly which will demand the gathering together of all your power. And there is only one way to be ready for such times as these, and that is to live waiting on the Lord, near Christ, with Him in your hearts, and then nothing will come that will be too hard for you. However rough the road, and however severe the struggle, and however swift the pace, you will be able to keep it up. Though it may be with panting lungs and a throbbing heart, and dim eyes and quivering muscles, yet if you wait on the Lord you will run and not be weary. You will be masters of the crises.

Strength to walk may be yours--that is to say, patient power for persistent pursuit of weary, monotonous duty. That is the hardest, and so it is named last. Many a man finds it easy, under the pressure of strong excitement, and for a moment or two, to keep up a swift pace, who finds it very difficult to keep steadily at unexciting work. And yet there is nothing to be done except by doggedly plodding along the dusty road of trivial duties, unhelped by excitement and unwearied by monotony. Only one thing will conquer the disgust at the wearisome round of mill-horse tasks which, sooner or later, seizes all godless men, and that is to bring the great principles of the gospel to bear on them, and to do them in the might and for the sake of the dear Lord. They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk along life's common way in cheerful godliness, and they shall not faint.

Dear friends, life to us all is, and must be, full of sorrow and of effort. Constant work and frequent sorrows wear us all out, and bring us many a time to the verge of fainting. I beseech you to begin right, and not to add to the other occasions for weariness that of having to retrace, with remorseful heart and ashamed feet, the paths of evil on which you have run. Begin right, which is to say, begin with Christ and take Him for inspiration, for pattern, for guide, for companion. Run with patience the race set before you, looking unto Jesus the author of your faith, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

And if you have Him in your hearts, then, however your creatural power may grow weary, yet because He is with you, your shoes shall be iron and brass, and as your days so shall your strength be, and you may lift up in your turn the glad, triumphant acknowledgment: For this cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed day by day.

God bless you all and make that your experience!