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

**ISAIAH-092. HOW TO MEET GOD by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember Thee in Thy ways."*

*Isaiah 64:5*

The prophet here shows us how there is a great staircase which we ourselves build, which leads straight from earth to heaven, and how we can secure that we shall meet with God and God with us. Isaiah is often called the evangelical prophet. He is so, not only because of his predictions of the suffering Servant of Jehovah which are fulfilled in Christ, but because his conceptions of the religious life tremble on the very verge of the full-orbed teaching of the New Testament. In these ancient words of my text, in very different phraseology indeed, we see a strikingly accurate and full anticipation of the very central teaching of Paul and his brother apostles, as to the way by which God and man come into union with one another. Thou meetest him that rejoiceth; that joy is to be manifested by working righteousness, but the joy which is the parent of righteousness is the child of something else--those that remember Thee in Thy ways. If we ponder these words, and carefully mark their relation to each other, we may discern, as it were, a great staircase with three flights in it, and at the top God's face.

We have to begin with the last clause of our text--Thou meetest him ... that remembers Thee in Thy ways.

**I.** The first stage on the road which will bring any man into, and keep any man in, contact with God, and loving fellowship with Him, is the contemplation of His character as it is made known to us by His acts. God, like man, is known by His fruits. You cannot get at a clear conception of God by speculation, or by thinking about Him or about what He is in Himself. Lay hold of the clue of His acts, and it leads you straight into His heart. But the act of acts, in which the whole Godhead concurs, in which all its depths and preciousness are concentrated, like wine in a golden cup, is the incarnation and life and death of Jesus Christ our Lord. There, and not in the thoughts of our own hearts nor the tremors of our own consciences, nor in the enigmatical witness of Providence--which is enigmatical until it is interpreted in the light of the Incarnation and the Crucifixion--there we see most clearly the ways of God, the beaten, trodden path by which He is wont to come forth out of the thick darkness into which no speculation can peer an inch, and walk amongst men. The cross of Christ, and, subordinately, His other dealings with us, as interpreted thereby, is the way of the Lord, from everlasting to everlasting. And it is by a loving gaze upon that way that we learn to know Him for what He is. It is there, and there only, that the thick darkness passes into glorious light. It is at that point alone that the closed circle of the Infinite nature of Deity opens so as that a man can press into the very centre of the glory, and feel himself at home in the blaze. It is those that remember Thee in Thy ways, and especially in that way of righteousness and peace, the way of the cross--it is they who have built the first flight of the solemn staircase that leads up from the lownesses and darknesses of earth into the loftinesses and lights of heaven.

But note that word Remember, for it suggests the warning that such contemplation of the ways of the Lord will not be realised by us without effort. We shall forget, assuredly, unless we earnestly try to remember. There are so many things within us to draw us away, the duties, and the joys, and the sorrows of life so insist upon having a place in our hearts and thoughts, that assuredly, unless by resolute effort, frequently repeated, we clear a space in this crowded and chattering market-place, where we can stand and gaze on the white summits far beyond the bustling crowd, we shall never see them, though they are visible from every place. Unless you try to remember, you will certainly forget.

Many voices preach to-day many duties for Christians. Let me plead for times of quiet, for times of doing nothing, for fruitful times of growth, for times when we turn all the rout and rabble of earthly things, and even the solemn company of pressing duties, out of our hearts and thoughts, and shut up ourselves alone with God. Be sure you will never build even the first step of the staircase unless you know what it is to go into the secret place of the Most High, and, alone with God, to summon to the sessions of sweet, silent thought His ways, and especially Him who is the Way, both of God to us, and of us to God.

**II.** Now, the second flight of this great staircase is pointed out in the first clause of my text: Thou meetest him that rejoiceth.

That meditative remembrance of the ways of God will be the parent of holy joy which will bring God near to our heart. Alas! it is too often the very opposite of true that men's joys are such as to bring God to them. The excitement, and often the impure elements, that mingle with what the world calls joy, are such as to shut Him out from us. But there is a gladness which comes from the contemplation of Him as He is, and as He is known by His ways to be, which brings us very near to God, and God very near to us. It is that joy which was spoken of in an earlier part of this context: I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, My soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation. Here, then, is the second stage--gladness, deep, pure, based upon the contemplation of God's character as manifested in His work. I do not think that the ordinary type of modern Christianity is half joyful enough. And I think that we have largely lost the very thought that gladness is a plain Christian duty, to be striven after in the appropriate manner which my text suggests, and certainly to be secured if we seek it in the right way. We all know how outward cares, and petty annoyances, and crushing sorrows, and daily anxieties, and the tear and wear of work, and our own restlessness and ungovernableness, and the faults that still haunt our lives, and sometimes make us feel as if our Christianity was all a sham--how all these things are at enmity with joy in God. But in face of them all, I would echo the old grand words of the epistle of gladness written by the apostle in prison, and within hail of his death: Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say rejoice. Recognise it as your duty to be glad, and if it is hard to be so, ask yourselves whether you are doing what will make you so, remembering Thee in Thy ways. That is the second flight of the staircase.

**III.** The third stage is working righteousness because of such joy. Thou meetest him that rejoiceth, and --because he does--worketh righteousness. Every master knows how much more work can be got out of a servant who works with a cheery heart than out of one that is driven reluctantly to his task. You remember our Lord's parable where He traces idleness to fear: I knew thee that thou wast an austere man, gathering where thou didst not strew, and I was afraid, and I went and hid thy talent. No work was got out of that servant because there was no joy in him. The opposite state of mind--diligence in righteous work, inspired by gladness which in its turn is inspired by the remembrance of God's ways--is the mark of a true servant of God. The prophet's words have the germ of the full New Testament doctrine that the first step to all practical obedience and righteous living is the recognition of the great truth of Christ's death for us on the Cross; that the second step is the acceptance of that great work, and the gladness that comes from the assurance of forgiveness and acceptance with God, and that the issue of both these things, the preached gospel and the faith that grasps it and the love by which the faith is followed, is obedience, instinct with willingness and buoyant with joyfulness, and therefore tending to be perfect in degree and in kind. The work that is worth doing, the work which God regards as righteous, comes, and comes only, from the motives of remembering Thee in Thy ways, and rejoicing because we do remember.

And the gladness which is wholesome and blessed, and is joy in the Lord, will manifest itself by efflorescing into all holiness and all loftiness and largeness of obedience. You may try to frighten men into righteousness, you will never succeed. You may try to coerce their wills, and your strongest bands will be broken as the iron chains were by the demoniac. But put upon them the silken leash of love, and you may lead them where you will. You cannot grow grapes on an iceberg, and you cannot get works of righteousness out of a man that has a dread of God at the back of his heart, killing all its joy. But let the spring sunshine come, and then all the frost-bound earth opens and softens, and the tender green spikelets push themselves up through the brown soil, and in due time come the blade, and the ear, and the full corn in the ear. Isaiah anticipated Paul when he said, Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness.

**IV.** Lastly, we have the landing-place to which the stair leads. God comes to such a man. He meets him indeed at all the stages, for there is a blessed communion with God, that springs immediately from remembering Him in His ways, and a still more blessed one that springs from rejoicing in His felt friendship and Fatherhood, and a yet more blessed one that comes from practical righteousness. For if there is anything that breaks our communion with God, it is that there linger in our lives evils which make it impossible for God and us to come close together. The thinnest film of a non-conductor will stop the flow of the strongest electric current, and an almost imperceptible film of self-will and evil, dropped between oneself and God, will make a barrier impermeable except by that divine Spirit who worketh upon a man's heart and who may thin away the film through his repentance, and then the Father and the prodigal embrace. Thou meetest him, not only that worketh righteousness, but that hates his sin.

Only remember, if there is the practice of evil, there cannot be the sunshine of the Presence of God. But remember, too, that the commonest, homeliest, smallest, most secular tasks may become the very highest steps of the staircase that brings us into His Presence. If we go about our daily work, however wearisome and vulgar and commonplace it often seems to us, and make it a work of righteousness resting on the joy of salvation, and that reposing on the contemplation of God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ, our daily work may bring us as close to God as if we dwelt in the secret place of the Most High, and the market and the shop may be a temple where we meet with Him.

Dear brethren, there are two kinds of meeting God: Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, and that is blessed, as when Christ met the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. There is another kind of meeting with God. Who, making war, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?