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

**JOB-004. JOB'S QUESTION, JESUS ANSWER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"If a man die, shall he live again?"*

*Job 14:14*

*"... I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: 26. And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."*

*Job 11:25,26*

Job's question waited long for an answer. Weary centuries rolled away; but at last the doubting, almost despairing, cry put into the mouth of the man of sorrows of the Old Testament is answered by the Man of Sorrows of the New. The answer in words is this second text which may almost be supposed to allude to the ancient question. The answer, in fact, is the resurrection of Christ. Apart from this answer there is none.

So we may take these two texts to help us to grasp more clearly and feel more profoundly what the world owes to that great fact which we are naturally led to think of to-day.

**I. The ancient and ever returning question.**

The Book of Job is probably a late part of the Old Testament. It deals with problems which indicate some advance in religious thought. Solemn and magnificent, and for the most part sad; it is like a Titan struggling with large problems, and seldom attaining to positive conclusions in which the heart or the head can rest in peace. Here all Job's mind is clouded with a doubt. He has just given utterance to an intense longing for a life beyond the grave. His abode in Sheol is thought of as in some sense a breach in the continuity of his consciousness, but even that would be tolerable, if only he could be sure that, after many days, God would remember him. Then that longing gives way before the torturing question of the text, which dashes aside the tremulous hope with its insistent interrogation. It is not denial, but it is a doubt which palsies hope. But though he has no certainty, he cannot part with the possibility, and so goes on to imagine how blessed it would be if his longing were fulfilled. He thinks that such a renewed life would be like the release of a sentry who had long stood on guard; he thinks of it as his swift, joyous answer to God's summons, which would draw him out from the sad crowd of pale shadows and bring him back to warmth and reality. His hope takes a more daring flight still, and he thinks of God as yearning for His creature, as His creature yearns for Him, and having a desire to the work of His hands, as if His heaven would be incomplete without His servant. But the rapture and the vision pass, and the rest of the chapter is all clouded over, and the devout hope loses its light. Once again it gathers brightness in the twenty-first chapter, where the possibility flashes out starlike, that after my skin hath been thus destroyed, yet from my flesh shall I see God.

These fluctuations of hope and doubt reveal to us the attitude of devout souls in Israel at a late era of the national life. And if they show us their high-water mark, we need not suppose that similar souls outside the Old Testament circle had solid certainty where these had but a variable hope. We know how large a development the doctrine of a future life had in Assyria and in Egypt, and I suppose we are entitled to say that men have always had the idea of a future. They have always had the thought, sometimes as a fear, sometimes as a hope, but never as a certainty. It has lacked not only certainty but distinctness. It has lacked solidity also, the power to hold its own and sustain itself against the weighty pressure of intrusive things seen and temporal.

But we need not go to the ends of the earth or to past generations for examples of a doubting, superficial hold of the truth that man lives through death and after it. We have only to look around us, and, alas! we have only to look within us. This age is asking the question again, and answering it in many tones, sometimes of indifferent disregard, sometimes flaunting a stark negative without reasoned foundation, sometimes with affirmatives with as little reason as these negatives. The modern world is caught in the rush and whirl of life, has its own sorrows to front, its own battles to fight, and large sections of it have never come as near an answer to Job's question as Job did.

**II. Christ's all-sufficing answer.**

He gave it there, by the grave of Lazarus, to that weeping sister, but He spoke these great words of calm assurance to all the world. One cannot but note the difference between His attitude in the presence of the great Mystery and that of all other teachers. How calmly, certainly, and confidently He speaks!

Mark that Jesus, even at that hour of agony, turns Martha's thoughts to Himself. What He is is the all-important thing for her to know. If she understands Him, life and death will have no insoluble problems nor any hopelessness for her. I am the Resurrection and the Life. She had risen in her grief to a lofty height in believing that even now--at this moment when help is vain and hope is dead--whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee, but Jesus offers to her a loftier conception of Him when He lays a sovereign hand on resurrection and life, and discloses that both inhere in Him, and from Him flow to all who shall possess them. He claims to have in Himself the fountain of life, in all possible senses of the word, as well as in the special sense relevant at that sad hour. Further, He tells Martha that by faith in Him any and all may possess that life. And then He majestically goes on to declare that the life which He gives is immune from, and untouched by, death. The believer shall live though he dies, the living believer shall never die. It is clear that, in these two great statements, to die is used in two different meanings, referring in the former case to the physical fact, and in the latter carrying a heavier weight of significance, namely the pregnant sense which it usually has in this Gospel, of separation from God and consequently from the true life of the soul. Physical death is not the termination of human life. The grim fact touches only the surface life, and has nothing to do with the essential, personal being. He that believes on Jesus, and he only, truly lives, and his union with Jesus secures his possession of that eternal life, which victoriously persists through the apparent, superficial change which men call death. Nothing dies but the death which surrounds the faithful soul. For it to die is to live more fully, more triumphantly, more blessedly. So though the act of physical death remains, its whole character is changed. Hence the New Testament euphemisms for death are much more than euphemisms. Men christen it by names which drape its ugliness, because they fear it so much, but Faith can play with Leviathan, because it fears it not at all. Hence such names as sleep, exodus, are tokens of the victory won for all believers by Jesus. He will show Martha the hope for all His followers which begins to dawn even in the calling of her brother back from the grip of death. And He shows us the great truth that His being the Life necessarily involved His being also the Resurrection, for His life-communicating work could not be accomplished till His all-quickening vitality had flowed over into, and flooded with its own conquering tides, not only the spirit which believes but its humble companion, the soul, and its yet humbler, the body. A bodily life is essential to perfect manhood, and Jesus will not stay His hand till every believer is full-summed in all his powers, and is perfect in body, soul, and spirit, after the image of Him who redeemed Him.

**III. The pledge for the truth of the answer.**

The words of Jesus are only words. These precious words, spoken to that one weeping sister in a little Jewish village, and which have brought hope to millions ever since, are as baseless as all the other dreams and longings of the heart, unless Jesus confirms them by fact. If He did not rise from the dead, they are but another of the noble, exalted, but futile delusions of which the world has many others. If Christ be not risen, His words of consolation are swelling words of emptiness; His whole claims are ended, and the age-old question which Job asked is unanswered still, and will always remain unanswered. If Christ be not risen, the hopeless colloquy between Jehovah and the prophet sums up all that can be said of the future life: Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, Thou knowest!

But Christ's resurrection is a fact which, taken in connection with His words while on earth, endorses these and establishes His claims to be the Declarer of the name of God, the Saviour of the world. It gives us demonstration of the continuity of life through and after death. Taken along with His ascension, which is but, so to speak, the prolongation of the point into a line, it declares that a glorified body and an abode in a heavenly home are waiting for all who by faith become here partakers in Jesus and are quickened by sharing in His life.

So in despite of sense and doubt and fear, notwithstanding teachers who, like the supercilious philosophers on Mars Hill, mock when they hear of a resurrection from the dead, we should rejoice in the great light which has shined into the region of the shadow of death, we should clasp His divine and most faithful answer to that old, despairing question, as the anchor of our souls, and lift up our hearts in thanksgiving in the triumphant challenge, O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?