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

**JOHN-024**. **THE SPRINGING FOUNTAIN by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life."*

*John 4:14*

There are two kinds of wells, one a simple reservoir, another containing the waters of a spring. It is the latter kind which is spoken about here, as is clear not only from the meaning of the word in the Greek, but also from the description of it as springing up. That suggests at once the activity of a fountain. A fountain is the emblem of motion, not of rest. Its motion is derived from itself, not imparted to it from without. Its silvery columnrises ever heavenward, though gravitation is too strong for it, and drags it back again.

So Christ promises to this ignorant, sinful Samaritan woman that if she chose He would plant in her soul a gift which would thus well up, by its own inherent energy, and fill her spirit with music, and refreshment, and satisfaction.

What is that gift? The answer may be put in various ways which really all come to one. It is Himself, the unspeakable Gift, His own greatest gift; or it is the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive, and whereby He comes and dwells in men's hearts; or it is the resulting life, kindred with the life bestowed, a consequence of the indwelling Christ and the present Spirit.

And so the promise is that they who believe in Him and rest upon His love shall receive into their spirits a new life principle which shall rise in their hearts like a fountain, springing up into everlasting life.

I think we shall best get the whole depth and magnitude of this great promise if, throwing aside all mere artificial order, we simply take the words as they stand here in the text, and think, first, of Christ's gift as a fountain within; then as a fountain springing, leaping up, by its own power; and then as a fountain springing into everlasting life.

**I. First, Christ's gift is represented here as a fountain within.**

Most men draw their supplies from without; they are rich, happy, strong, only when externals minister to them strength, happiness, riches. For the most of us, what we have is that which determines our felicity.

Take the lowest type of life, for instance, the men of whom the majority, alas! I suppose, in every time is composed, who live altogether on the low plane of the world, and for the world alone, whether their worldliness take the form of sensuous appetite, or of desire to acquire wealth and outward possessions. The thirst of the body is the type of the experience of all such people. It is satisfied and slaked for a moment, and then back comes the tyrannous appetite again. And, alas! the things that you drink to satisfy the thirst of your souls are too often like a publican's adulterated beer, which has got salt in it, and chemicals, and all sorts of things to stir up, instead of slaking and quenching, the thirst. So he that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase. The appetite grows by what it feeds on, and a little lust yielded to to-day is a bigger one to-morrow, and half a glass to-day grows to a bottle in a twelvemonth. As the old classical saying has it, he who begins by carrying a calf, before long is able to carry an ox; so the thirst in the soul needs and drinks down a constantly increasing draught.

And even if we rise up into a higher region and look at the experience of the men who have in some measure learned that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth, nor in the abundance of the gratification that his animal nature gets, but that there must be an inward spring of satisfaction, if there is to be any satisfaction at all; if we take men who live for thought, and truth, and mental culture, and yield themselves up to the enthusiasm for some great cause, and are proud of saying, My mind to me a kingdom is, though they present a far higher style of life than the former, yet even that higher type of man has so many of his roots in the external world that he is at the mercy of chances and changes, and he, too, has deep in his heart a thirst that nothing, no truth, no wisdom, no culture, nothing that addresses itself to one part of his nature, though it be the noblest and the loftiest, can ever satisfy and slake.

I am sure I have some such people in my audience, and to them this message comes. You may have, if you will, in your own hearts, a springing fountain of delight and of blessedness which will secure that no unsatisfied desires shall ever torment you. Christ in His fulness, His Spirit, the life that flows from both and is planted within our hearts, these are offered to us all; and if we have them we carry inclosed within ourselves all that is essential to our felicity; and we can say, I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be self-satisfying, not with the proud, stoical independence of a man who does not want either God or man to make him blessed, but with the humble independence of a man who can say my sufficiency is of God.

No independence of externals is possible, nor wholesome if it were possible, except that which comes from absolute dependence on Jesus Christ.

If you have Christ in your heart then life is possible, peace is possible, joy is possible, under all circumstances and in all places. Everything which the soul can desire, it possesses. You will be like the garrison of a beleaguered castle, in the courtyard of which is a sparkling spring, fed from some source high up in the mountains, and finding its way in there by underground channels which no besiegers can ever touch. Sorrows will come, and make you sad, but though there may be much darkness round about you, there will be light in the darkness. The trees may be bare and leafless, but the sap has gone down to the roots. The world may be all wintry and white with snow, but there will be a bright little fire burning on your own hearthstone. You will carry within yourselves all the essentials to blessedness. If you have Christ in the vesselyou can smile at the storm. They that drink from earth's fountains shall thirst again; but they who have Christ in their hearts will have a fountain within which will not freeze in the bitterest cold, nor fail in the fiercest heat. The water that I shall give him shall be in him a fountain.

**II. Christ's gift is a springing fountain.**

The emblem, of course, suggests motion by its own inherent impulse. Water may be stagnant, or it may yield to the force of gravity and slide down a descending river-bed, or it may be pumped up and lifted by external force applied to it, or it may roll as it does in the sea, drawn by the moon, driven by the winds, borne along by currents that owe their origin to outward heat or cold. But a fountain rises by an energy implanted within itself, and is the very emblem of joyous, free, self-dependent and self-regulated activity.

And so, says Christ, The water that I shall give him shall be in him a springing fountain; it shall not lie there stagnant, but leap like a living thing, up into the sunshine, and flash there, turned into diamonds, when the bright rays smile upon it.

So here is the promise of two things: the promise of activity, and of an activity which is its own law.

The promise of activity. There seems small blessing, in this overworked world, in a promise of more active exertion; but what an immense part of our nature lies dormant and torpid if we are not Christians! How much of the work that is done is dreary, wearisome, collar-work, against the grain. Do not the wheels of life often go slowly? Are you not often weary of the inexpressible monotony and fatigue? And do you not go to your work sometimes, though with a fierce feeling of need-to-do-it, yet also with inward repugnance? And are there not great parts of your nature that have never woke into activity at all, and are ill at ease, because there is no field of action provided for them? The mind is like millstones; if you do not put the wheat into them to grind, they will grind each other's faces. So some of us are fretting ourselves to pieces, or are sick of a vague disease, and are morbid and miserable because the highest and noblest parts of our nature have never been brought into exercise. Surely this promise of Christ's should come as a true Gospel to such, offering, as it does, if we will trust ourselves to Him, a springing fountain of activity in our hearts that shall fill our whole being with joyous energy, and make it a delight to live and to work. It will bring to us new powers, new motives; it will set all the wheels of life going at double speed. We shall be quickened by the presence of that mighty power, even as a dim taper is brightened and flames up when plunged into a jar of oxygen. And life will be delightsome in its hardest toil, when it is toil for the sake of, and by the indwelling strength of, that great Lord and Master of our work.

And there is not only a promise of activity here, but of activity which is its own law and impulse. That is a blessed promise in two ways. In the first place, law will be changed into delight. We shall not be driven by a commandment standing over us with whip and lash, or coming behind us with spur and goad, but that which we ought to do we shall rejoice to do; and inclination and duty will coincide in all our lives when our life is Christ's life in us.

That should be a blessing to some of you who have been fighting against evil and trying to do right with more or less success, more or less interruptedly and at intervals, and have felt the effort to be a burden and a wearisomeness. Here is a promise of emancipation from all that constraint and yoke of bondage which duty discerned and unloved ever lays upon a man's shoulders. When we carry within us the gift of a life drawn from Jesus Christ, and are able to say like Him, Lo, I come to do Thy will, and Thy law is within my heart, only then shall we have peace and joy in our lives. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes us free from the law of sin and death.

And then, in the second place, that same thought of an activity which is its own impulse and its own law, suggests another aspect of this blessedness, namely, that it sets us free from the tyranny of external circumstances which absolutely shape the lives of so many of us. The lives of all must be to a large extent moulded by these, but they need not, and should not be completely determined by them. It is a miserable thing to see men and women driven before the wind like thistledown. Circumstances must influence us, but they may either influence us to base compliance and passive reception of their stamp, or to brave resistance and sturdy nonconformity to their solicitations. So used, they will influence us to a firmer possession of the good which is most opposite to them, and we shall be the more unlike our surroundings, the more they abound in evil. You can make your choice whether, if I may so say, you shall be like balloons that are at the mercy of the gale and can only shape their course according as it comes upon them and blows them along, or like steamers that have an inward power that enables them to keep their course from whatever point the wind blows, or like some sharply built sailing-ship that, with a strong hand at the helm, and canvas rightly set, can sail almost in the teeth of the wind and compel it to bear her along in all but the opposite direction to that in which it would carry her if she lay like a log on the water.

I beseech you all, and especially you young people, not to let the world take and shape you, like a bit of soft clay put into a brick-mould, but to lay a masterful hand upon it, and compel it to help you, by God's grace, to be nobler, and truer, and purer.

It is a shame for men to live the lives that so many amongst us live, as completely at the mercy of externals to determine the direction of their lives as the long weeds in a stream that yield to the flow of the current. It is of no use to preach high and brave maxims, telling men to assert their lordship over externals, unless we can tell them how to find the inward power that will enable them to do so. But we can preach such noble exhortations to some purpose when we can point to the great gift which Christ is ready to give, and exhort them to open their hearts to receive that indwelling power which shall make them free from the dominion of these tyrant circumstances and emancipate them into the liberty of the sons of God. The water that I shall give him shall be in him a leaping fountain.

**III. The last point here is that Christ's gift is a fountain springing up into everlasting life.**

The water of a fountain rises by its own impulse, but howsoever its silver column may climb it always falls back into its marble basin. But this fountain rises higher, and at each successive jet higher, tending towards, and finally touching, its goal, which is at the same time its course. The water seeks its own level, and the fountain climbs until it reaches Him from whom it comes, and the eternal life in which He lives. We might put that thought in two ways. First, the gift is eternal in its duration. The water with which the world quenches its thirst perishes. All supplies and resources dry up like winter torrents in summer heat. All created good is but for a time. As for some, it perishes in the use; as for other, it evaporates and passes away, or is as water spilt upon the ground which cannot be gathered up; as for all, we have to leave it behind when we go hence. But this gift springs into everlasting life, and when we go it goes with us. The Christian character is identical in both worlds, and however the forms and details of pursuits may vary, the essential principle remains one. So that the life of a Christian man on earth and his life in heaven are but one stream, as it were, which may, indeed, like some of those American rivers, run for a time through a deep, dark canyon, or in an underground passage, but comes out at the further end into broader, brighter plains and summer lands; where it flows with a quieter current and with the sunshine reflected on its untroubled surface, into the calm ocean. He has one gift and one life for earth and heaven--Christ and His Spirit, and the life that is consequent upon both.

And then the other side of this great thought is that the gift tends to, is directed towards, or aims at and reaches, everlasting life. The whole of the Christian experience on earth is a prophecy and an anticipation of heaven. The whole of the Christian experience of earth evidently aims towards that as its goal, and is interpreted by that as its end. What a contrast that is to the low and transient aims which so many of us have! The lives of many men go creeping along the surface when they might spring heavenwards. My friend! which is it to be with you? Is your life to be like one of those Northern Asiatic rivers that loses itself in the sands, or that flows into, or is sluggishly lost in, a bog; or is it going to tumble over a great precipice, and fall sounding away down into the blackness; or is it going to leap up into everlasting life? Which of the two aims is the wiser, is the nobler, is the better?

And a life that thus springs will reach what it springs towards. A fountain rises and falls, for the law of gravity takes it down; this fountain rises and reaches, for the law of pressure takes it up, and the water rises to the level of its source. Christ's gift mocks no man, it sets in motion no hopes that it does not fulfil; it stimulates to no work that it does not crown with success. If you desire a life that reaches its goal, a life in which all your desires are satisfied, a life that is full of joyous energy, that of a free man emancipated from circumstances and from the tyranny of unwelcome law, and victorious over externals, open your hearts to the gift that Christ offers you; the gift of Himself, of His death and passion, of His sacrifice and atonement, of His indwelling and sanctifying Spirit.

He offered all the fulness of that grace to this Samaritan woman, in her ignorance, in her profligacy, in her flippancy. He offers it to you. His offer awoke an echo in her heart, will it kindle any response in yours? Oh! when He says to you, The water that I shall give will be in you a fountain springing into everlasting life, I pray you to answer as she did--Sir!--Lord--give me this water, that I thirst not; neither come to earth's broken cisterns to draw.