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

**JOSHUA-010. THE SUN STAYED by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon."*

*Joshua 10:12*

The last time, what a sad sound that has! In all minds there is a shrinking from the last time of doing even some common act. The walk down a street that we have passed every day for twenty years, and never cared in the least about, and the very doorsteps and the children in the streets, have an interest for us, as pensively we leave the commonplace familiar scene.

On this last Sunday of another year, there comes a tone of sober meditation over us, as we think that it is the last. I would fain let the hour preach. I have little to say but to give voice to its lessons.

My text is only taken as a starting-point, and I shall say nothing about Joshua and his prayer. I do not discuss whether this was a miracle or not. It seems, at any rate, to be taken by the writer of the story as one. What a picture he draws of the fugitives rushing down the rocky pass, blind in their fear, behind them the flushed and eager conqueror, the burst of the sudden tempest and far in the west the crescent moon, the leader on the hilltop with his prayer for but one hour or two more of daylight to finish the wild work so well begun! And, says the story, his wish was granted, and no day has been like it before or since, in which the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man. Once, and only once, did time seem to stand still; from the beginning till now it has been going steadily on, and even then it only seemed to stand. That day seemed longer, but life was passing all the same.

And so the first thought forced upon us here by our narrative and by the season is the old one, so commonplace and yet so solemn.

**I. Life inexorably slides away from us.**

Once, and only once, it seemed to pause. How often since has Joshua's prayer been prayed again! By the fearful,--the wretch to be hanged at eight o'clock to-morrow morning, the man whom the next train will part from all he loves. By the hopeful,--the child wearying for the holidays, the bridegroom,

Gallop apace, ye fiery-footed steeds!

By the suffering,

Would God it were evening!

By the martyr amid the flames,

Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

But all in vain. We cannot expand the moments to hours, nor compress the hours to moments. Leaden or winged, the hours are hours. The cold-blooded pendulum ticks on, equable and unaltered, and after sixty minutes, no sooner and no later, the hour strikes. There is a time for every purpose.

How solemn is the thought of that constant process! It goes on for ever, like the sea fog creeping up from the wide ocean and burying life and sunshine in its fatal folds, or like the ever-flowing river, or like the fall plunging over the edge of the cliff, or like the motions of the midnight sky. Each moment in its turn passes into the colourless stony past, and the shadow creeps up the hillside.

And how unnoticed it is! We only know motion by the jolts. The revolution of the earth and its rush along its orbit are unfelt by us. We are constantly startled to feel how long ago such and such a thing took place. The mother sees her little girl at her knee, and in a few days, as it seems, finds her a woman. How immense is our life in the prospect, how awfully it collapses in the retrospect! Only by seeing constellation after constellation set, do we know that the heavens are in motion. We have need of an effort of serious reflection to realise that it is of us and of our lives that all these old commonplaces are true.

That constant, unnoticed progress has an end. Our life is a definite period, having a bounded past behind it, a present, and a bounded future before it. We have a sandglass and it runs out. We are like men sliding down a rope or hauling a boat towards a fixed point. The sea is washing away our sandy island, and is creeping nearer and nearer to where we stand, and will wash over us soon. No cries, nor prayers, nor wishes will avail. It is vain for us to say, Sun! stand thou still!

**II. Therefore our chief care should be to finish our work in our day.**

Joshua had his day lengthened; we can come to the same result by crowding ours with service. What is the purpose of life? Is it a shop? or a garden? a school? No. Our chief end is to become like God and a little to help forward His cause. All is intended to develop character; all life is disciplinary.

God's purpose should be our desire. That desire should mould all our thoughts and acts. There should be no mere sentimental regrets for the past, but the spirit of consecration should affect our thoughts about it. There should be penitence, thankfulness, not vain mourning over what is gone. There should be no waste or selfish use of the present. What is it given us for but to use for God?

Strenuous work is the true way to lengthen each day. Time is infinitely elastic. The noblest work is to do the works of Him that sent me. There should be no care for the future. It is in His hand. There will be room in it for doing all His will.

Lord, it belongs not to my care,

Whether I die or live.

**III. If so, the passing day will have results that never pass.**

Joshua's day was long enough for his work, and that work was a victory which told on future generations. So life, short as it is, will be long enough for all that we have to do and learn and be.

Christ's servant is immortal till his work is done.

God gives every man time enough for his salvation.

What may we bring out of life? Character, Christ-likeness, thankful memories, union with God, capacity for heaven. The transient leaves the abiding. The flood foams itself away, but deposits rich soil on the plain.

**IV. Thus the passing away of what must pass may become a joy.**

Why should we be sad? There are reasons enough, as many sad, lonely hearts among us know too well. To some men dark thoughts of death and judgment make the crumbling away of life too gloomy a fact to be contemplated, but it may and should be calm joy to us that the weary world ends and a blessed life begins. We may count the moments and see them pass, as a bride watches the hours rolling on to her marriage morning; not, indeed, without tremor and sadness at leaving her old home, but yet with meek hope and gentle joy.

It is possible for men to see that life is but as a shadow that declineth, and yet to be glad. By faith in Christ, united to Him Who is for ever and ever, our souls shall triumph over death and thee, O time.

We need not cry, Sun! stand still! but rather, Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

Then Time shall be the lackey to eternity, and Death be the porter of heaven's gate, and we shall pass from the land of setting suns and waning moons and change and sorrow, to that land where thy sun shall no more go down, and there shall be no more time.