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

**JOSHUA-012. CALEB -- A GREEN OLD AGE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And Caleb... said unto him (Joshua), Thou knowest the thing that the Lord said unto Moses the man of God concerning me and thee in Kadesh-barnea."*

*Joshua 14:6*

Five and forty years had passed since the Lord had said this thing. It was the promise to these two, now old men, of the prolongation of their lives, and to Caleb of his inheritance in the land. Seven years of fighting have been got through, and the preparations are being made for the division of the land by lot. But, before that is done, it is fitting that Caleb, whose portion had been specially secured to him by that old promise, should have the promise specially recognised and endorsed by the action of the leader, and independent of the operation of the lot. So he appears before Joshua, accompanied by the head men of his tribe, whose presence expresses their official consent to the exceptional treatment of their tribesman, and urges his request in a little speech, full of pathos and beauty and unconscious portraiture of the speaker. I take it as a picture of an ideal old age, showing in an actual instance how happy, vigorous, full of buoyant energy and undiminished appetite for enterprise a devout old age may be. And my purpose now is not merely to comment on the few words of our text, but upon the whole of what falls from the lips of Caleb here.

**I. I see then here, first, a life all built upon God's promise.**

Five times in the course of his short plea with Joshua does he use the expression the Lord spake. On the first occasion of the five he unites Joshua with himself as a recipient of the promise, Thou knowest the thing that the Lord said concerning me and thee. But in the other four he takes it all to himself; not because it concerned him only, but because his confidence, laying hold of the promise, forgot his brother in the earnestness of his personal appropriation of it. And so, whatsoever general words God speaks to the world, a true believer will make them his very own; and when Christ says, God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, faith translates it into He loved me, and gave Himself for me. This is the first characteristic of a life built upon the promise of God, that it lays its hand upon that promise and claims it all for its very own.

Then notice, still further, how for all these forty-five years Caleb had hid the word in his heart, had lived upon it and thought about it and believed it, and recognised the partial fulfilment of it, and cherished the secret fire unknown to any besides. And now at last, after so long an interval, he comes forward and stretches out a hand, unweakened by the long delay, to claim the perfect fulfilment at the end of his days. So the vision may tarry, but a life based upon God's promise has another estimate of swiftness and slowness than is current amongst men who have only the years of earthly life to reckon by; and that which to sense seems a long, weary delay, to faith seems but as a watch in the night'. The world, which only measures time by its own revolutions, has to lament over what seem to the sufferers long years of pains and tears, but in the calendar of faith weeping endures for a night, joy cometh in the morning. The weary days dwindle into a point when they are looked at with an eye that has been accustomed to gaze on the solemn eternities of a promising and a faithful God. To it, as to Him, a thousand years are as one day; and one day, in the possibilities of divine favour and spiritual growth which it may enfold, as a thousand years. To the men who measure time as God measures it, His help, howsoever long it may tarry, ever comes right early.

Further, note how this life, built upon faith in the divine promise, was nourished and nurtured by instalments of fulfilment all along the road. Two promises were given to Caleb--one, that his life should be prolonged, and the other, that he should possess the territory into which he had so bravely ventured. The daily fulfilment of the one fed the fire of his faith in the ultimate accomplishment of the other, and he gratefully recounts it now, as part of his plea with Joshua--Now, behold, the Lord hath kept me alive as He spake, these forty and five years, even since the Lord spake this word unto Moses. And now, lo! I am this day fourscore and five years old.

Whosoever builds his life on the promise of God has in the present the guarantee of the better future. As we are journeying onwards to that great fountain-head of all sweetness and felicity, there are ever trickling brooks from it by the way, at which we may refresh our thirsty lips and invigorate our fainting strength. The present instalment carries with it the pledge of the full discharge of the obligation, and he whose heart and hope is fixed with a forward look on the divine inheritance, may, as he looks backward over all the years, see clearly in them one unbroken mass of preserving providences, and thankfully say, The Lord hath kept me alive, as He spake.

And, still further, the life that is built upon faith like this man's, is a life of buoyant hopefulness till the very end. The hopes of age are few and tremulous. When the feast is nearly over, and the appetite is dulled, there is little more to be done, but to push back our chairs and go away. But God keeps the good wine until the last. And when all earthly hopes are beginning to wear thin and to burn dim, then the great hope of the mountain of the inheritance will rise brighter and clearer upon our horizon. It is something to have a hope so far in front of us that we never get up to it, to find it either less than our expectations or more than our desires; and this is not the least of the blessednesses of the living hope that maketh not ashamed, that it lies before us till the very end, and beckons and draws us across the gulf of darkness. The Lord hath kept me alive, as He said; now give me this mountain whereof the Lord spake.

**II. Further, I see here a life that bears to be looked back at.**

Caleb becomes almost garrulous in telling over the old story of that never-to-be-forgotten day, when he and Joshua stood alone and tried to put some heart into the cowardly mob before them. There is no mock modesty about the man. He says that, amidst many temptations to be untrue, he gave his report with sincerity and veracity, speaking as it was in mine heart, and then he quotes twice, with a permissible satisfaction, the eulogium that had come upon him from the divine lips, I wholly followed the Lord my God. The private soldier's cheek may well flush and his eye glitter as he repeats over again his general's praise. And for Caleb, half a century has not dimmed the impression that was made on his heart when he received that praise, through the lips of Moses, from God.

Now, of course, such a tone of speaking about one's past savours of an earlier stage in revelation than that in which we live, and, if this were to be taken as a man's total account of his whole life, we could not free it from the charge of unpleasing self-complacency and self-righteousness. But for all that, it is not the same thing in the retrospect whether you and I have to look back upon years that have been given to self, and the world, and passion, and pride, and covetousness, and frivolities and trifles of all sorts, or upon years that in the main, and regard being had to their deepest desires and governing direction, have been given to God and to His service. Many a man looking back upon his life--I wonder if there are any such men listening to me now--can only see such a sight as Abraham did on that morning when he looked down on the plain of Sodom, and Lo! the smoke of the land went up as the smoke of a furnace. Dear friends I the only thing that makes life in the retrospect tolerable is that it shall have been given to God, and that we can say, I wholly followed the Lord my God.

**III. Again, I see here a life which has discovered the secret of perpetual youth.**

I, says the old man--am as strong this day as I was in the day when Moses sent me. As my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out and to come in. For fighting, and for all the intercourse and manifold activities of life, his sinews are as braced, his eyes as clear, his spirit and limbs as alert as they were in those old days. No doubt you will say that was due to miraculous intervention. No doubt it was; but is it not true that, in a very real sense, a man may keep himself young all his life, if he will go the right way to work? And the secret of perpetual youthfulness lies here, in giving our hearts to God and in living for Him. Christianity, with its self-restraint and its exhortations to all, and especially to the young, to be chaste and temperate and to subdue the animal passions, has a direct tendency to conserve physical vigour; and Christianity, by the inspiration that it imparts, the stimulus that it gives, and the hopes that it permits us to cherish, has a direct tendency to keep alive in old age all the best of the characteristics of youth. Its buoyancy, its undimmed interest, its cheeriness, its freedom from anxiety and care--all these things are directly ministered to, and preserved by, a life of simple faith that casts itself upon God, and dwells securely, in joy and in restfulness, and not without a great light of hope, even when the shadows of evening are falling.

One of the greatest and most blessed of the characteristics of youth is the consciousness that the most of life lies before us; and to a Christian man, in any stage of his earthly life, that consciousness is possible. When he stands on the verge of the last sinking sandbank of time, and the water is up to his ankles, he may well feel that the best and the most of life is yet to be.

The last of life, for which the first was made:

Our times are in His hand

Who saith, "A whole I planned.

Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid."'

They shall still bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be full of sap and green. A gnarled old tree may be green in all its branches, and blossom and fruit may hang together there. The ideal of life is, that into each stage we shall carry the best of the preceding, harmonised with the best of the new, and that is possible to a Christian soul. The fountain of perpetual youth, of which the ancients fabled, is no fable, but a fact; and it rises, where the prophet in his vision saw the stream coming out, from beneath the threshold of the Temple door.

**IV. So, lastly, I see here a beautiful example of a life which to the last is ready for danger and enterprise.**

Caleb's words as to his undiminished strength were not meant for a boast. They express thankfulness and praise, and they are put as the ground of the request that he has to make. He gives a chivalrous reason for his petition when he says, Now, therefore, give me this mountain, for the Anakims (the giants) are there; and the cities great and fenced.

Caleb's readiness for one more fight was fed by his reliance on God's help in it. When he says, It may be the Lord will be with me, the perhaps is that of humility, not of doubt. The old warrior's eye flashes, and his voice sounds strong and full, as he ends his words with I shall drive them out, as the Lord spake. That has the true ring. What were the three Anak chiefs, with their barbarous names, Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai, and their giant stature, to the onset of a warrior faith like that? Of course, Caleb drove out thence the three sons of Anak, and Hebron became his inheritance. Nothing can stand against us, if we seek for our portion, not where advantages are greatest, but where difficulties and dangers are most rife, and cast ourselves into the conflict, sure that God is with us, though humbly wondering that we should be worthy of His all-conquering presence, and sure, therefore, that victory marches by our sides.

Old age is generally much more disposed to talk about its past victories than to fight new ones; to rest upon its arms, or upon its laurels, than to undertake fresh conflicts. Now and then we see a man, statesman or other, who, bearing the burden of threescore years and ten lightly, is still as alert of spirit, as eager for work, as bold for enterprise, as he was years before. And in nine cases out of ten such a man is a Christian; and his brilliant energy of service is due, not only, nor so much, to natural vigour of constitution as to religion, which has preserved his vigour because it has preserved his purity, and been to him a stimulus and an inspiration.

Danger is an attraction to the generous mind. It is the coward and the selfish man who are always looking for an easy place, where somebody else will do the work. This man felt that this miraculously prolonged life of his bound him to special service, and the fact that up in Hebron there were a fenced city and tall giants behind the battlements, was an additional reason for picking out that bit of the field as the place where he ought to be. Thank God, that spirit is not dead yet! It has lived all through the Christian Church, and flamed up in times of martyrdom. On missionary fields to-day, if one man falls two are ready to step into his place. It is the true spirit of the Christian soldier. A great door and effectual is opened, says Paul, and there are many adversaries. He knew the door was opened because the adversaries were many. And because there were so many of them, would he run away? Some of us would have said: I must abandon that work, it bristles with difficulties; I cannot stop in that post, the bullets are whistling too fast. Nay! says Paul; I abide till Pentecost--a good long while-- because the post is dangerous, and promises to be fruitful.

So, dear friends, if we would have lives on which we can look back, lives in which early freshness will last beyond the morning dew, lives in which there shall come, day by day and moment by moment, abundant foretastes to stay our hunger until we sit at Christ's table in His kingdom, we must follow the Lord alway, with no half-hearted surrender, nor partial devotion, but give ourselves to Him utterly, to be guided and sent where He will. And then, like Caleb, we shall be able to say, with a perhaps, not of doubt, but of wonder, that it should be so, to us unworthy, It may be the Lord will be with me, arid I shall drive them out. In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.