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

**MATTHEW-113**. **TWO FORMS OF ONE SAYING by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved."*

*Matthew 24:13 (R.V.)*

*"In your patience possess ye your souls."*

*Matthew 21:19*

These two sayings, different as they sound in our Version, are probably divergent representations of one original. The reasons for so supposing are manifold and obvious on a little consideration. In the first place, the two sayings occur in the Evangelistsreports of the same prophecy and at the same point therein. In the second place, the verbal resemblance is much greater than appears in our Authorised Version, because the word rendered patiencein Luke is derived from that translated endurethin Matthew; and the true connection between the two versions of the saying would have been more obvious if we had had a similar word in both, reading in the one he that endureth, and in the other in your endurance. In the third place, the difference between these two sayings presented in our Version, in that the one is a promise and the other a command, is due to an incorrect reading of St. Luke's words. The Revised Version substitutes for the imperative possessthe promise ye shall possess, and with that variation the two sayings are brought a good deal nearer each other. In both endurance is laid down as the condition, which in both is followed by a promise. Then, finally, there need be no difficulty in seeing that possessing, or, more literally, gaining your souls, is an exact equivalent of the other expression, ye shall be saved. One cannot but remember our Lord's solemn antithetical phrase about a man losing his own soul. To win one's soulis to be saved; to be saved is to win one's soul.

So I think I have made out my thesis that the two sayings are substantially one. They carry a great weight of warning, of exhortation, and of encouragement to us all. Let us try now to reap some of that harvest.

**I. First, then, notice the view of our condition which underlies these sayings.**

It is a sad and a somewhat stern one, but it is one to which, I think, most men's hearts will respond, if they give themselves leisure to think; and if they see life steadily, and see it whole. For howsoever many days are bright, and howsoever all days are good, yet, on the whole, man is a soldier, and life is a fight. For some of us it is simple endurance; for all of us it has sometimes been agony; for all of us, always, it presents resistance to every kind of high and noble career, and especially to the Christian one. Easy-going optimists try to skim over these facts, but they are not to be so lightly set aside. You have only to look at the faces that you meet in the street to be very sure that it is always a grave and sometimes a bitter thing to live. And so our two texts presuppose that life on the whole demands endurance, whatever may be included in that great word.

Think of the inward resistance and outward hindrances to every lofty life. The scholar, the man of culture, the philanthropist--all who would live for anything else than the present, the low, and the sensual--find that there is a banded conspiracy, as it were, against them, and that they have to fight their way by continual antagonism, by continual persistence, as well as by continual endurance. Within, weakness, torpor, weariness, levity, inconstant wills, bright purposes clouding over, and all the cowardice and animalism of our nature war continually against the better, higher self. And without, there is a down-dragging, as persistent as the force of gravity, coming from the whole assemblage of external things that solicit, and would fain seduce us. The old legends used to tell us how, whensoever a knight set out upon any great and lofty quest, his path was beset on either side by voices, sometimes whispering seductions, and sometimes shrieking maledictions, but always seeking to withdraw him from his resolute march onwards to his goal. And every one of us, if we have taken on us the orders of any lofty chivalry, and especially if we have sworn ourselves knights of the Cross, have to meet the same antagonism. Then, too, there are golden apples rolled upon our path, seeking to draw us away from our steadfast endurance.

Besides the hindrances in every noble path, the hindrances within and the hindrances without, the weight of self and the drawing of earth, there come to us all--in various degrees no doubt, and in various shapes--but to all of us there come the burdens of sorrows and cares, and anxieties and trials. Wherever two or three are gathered together, even if they gather for a feast, there will be some of them who carry a sorrow which they know well will never be lifted off their shoulders and their hearts, until they lay down all their burdens at the grave's mouth; and it is weary work to plod on the path of life with a weight that cannot be shifted, with a wound that can never be stanched.

Oh, brethren, rosy-coloured optimism is all a dream. The recognition of the good that is in the evil is the devout man's talisman, but there is always need for the resistance and endurance which my texts prescribe. And the youngest of us, the gladdest of us, the least experienced of us, the most frivolous of us, if we will question our own hearts, will hear their Amen to the stern, sad view of the facts of earthly life which underlies this text.

Though it has many other aspects, the world seems to me sometimes to be like that pool at Jerusalem in the five porches of which lay, groaning under various diseases, but none of them without an ache, a great multitude of impotent folk, halt and blind. Astronomers tell us that one, at any rate, of the planets rolls on its orbit swathed in clouds and moisture. The world moves wrapped in a mist of tears. God only knows them all, but each heart knows its own bitterness and responds to the words, Ye have need of patience.

**II. Now, secondly, mark the victorious temper.**

That is referred to in the one saying by he that endureth, and in the other in your endurance. Now, it is very necessary for the understanding of many places in Scripture to remember that the notion either of patience or of endurance by no means exhausts the power of this noble Christian word. For these are passive virtues, and however excellent and needful they may be, they by no means sum up our duty in regard to the hindrances and sorrows, the burdens and weights, of which I have been trying to speak. For you know it is only what cannot be curedthat must be endured, and even incurable things are not merely to be endured, but they ought to be utilised. It is not enough that we should build up a dam to keep the floods of sorrow and trial from overflowing our fields; we must turn the turbid waters into our sluices, and get them to drive our mills. It is not enough that we should screw ourselves up to lie unresistingly under the surgeon's knife; though God knows that it is as much as we can manage sometimes, and we have to do as convicts under the lash do, get a bit of lead or a bullet into our mouths, and bite at it to keep ourselves from crying out. But that is not all our duty in regard to our trials and difficulties. There is required something more than passive endurance.

This noble word of my texts does mean a great deal more than that. It means active persistence as well as patient submission. It is not enough that we should stand and bear the pelting of the pitiless storm, unmurmuring and unbowed by it; but we are bound to go on our course, bearing up and steering right onwards. Persistent perseverance in the path that is marked out for us is especially the virtue that our Lord here enjoins. It is well to sit still unmurmuring; it is better to march on undiverted and unchecked. And when we are able to keep straight on in the path which is marked out for us, and especially in the path that leads us to God, notwithstanding all opposing voices, and all inward hindrances and reluctances; when we are able to go to our tasks of whatever sort they are and to do them, though our hearts are beating like sledge-hammers; when we say to ourselves, It does not matter a bit whether I am sad or glad, fresh or wearied, helped or hindered by circumstances, this one thing I do, then we have come to understand and to practise the grace that our Master here enjoins. The endurance which wins the soul, and leads to salvation, is no mere passive submission, excellent and hard to attain as that often is; but it is brave perseverance in the face of all difficulties, and in spite of all enemies.

Mark how emphatically our Lord here makes the space within which that virtue has to be exercised conterminous with the whole duration of our lives. I need not discuss what the endwas in the original application of the words; that would take us too far afield. But this I desire to insist upon, that right on to the very close of life we are to expect the necessity of putting forth the exercise of the very same persistence by which the earlier stages of any noble career must necessarily be marked. In other departments of life there may be relaxation, as a man goes on through the years; but in the culture of our characters, and in the deepening of our faith, and in the drawing near to our God, there must be no cessation or diminution of earnestness and of effort right up to the close.

There are plenty of people, and I dare say that I address some of them now, who began their Christian career full of vigour and with a heat that was too hot to last. But, alas, in a year or two all the fervency was past, and they settled down into the average, easygoing, unprogressive Christian, who is a wet blanket to the devotion and work of a Christian church. I wonder how many of us would scarcely know our own former selves if we could see them. Christian people, to how many of us should the word be rung in our ears: Ye did run well; what did hinder you? The answer is--Myself.

But may I say that this emphatic to the endhas a special lesson for us older people, who, as natural strength abates and enthusiasm cools down, are apt to be but the shadows of our old selves in many things? But there should be fire within the mountain, though there may be snow on its crest. Many a ship has been lost on the harbour bar; and there is no excuse for the captain leaving the bridge, or the engineer coming up from the engine-room, stormy as the one position and stifling as the other may be, until the anchor is down, and the vessel is moored and quiet in the desired haven. The desert, with its wild beasts and its Bedouin, reaches right up to the city gates, and until we are within these we need to keep our hands on our sword-hilts and be ready for conflict. He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.

**III. Lastly, note the crown which endurance wins.**

Now, I need not spend or waste your time in mere verbal criticism, but I wish to point out that that word soulin one of our two texts means both the soul and the life of which it is the seat; and also to remark that the being saved and the winning of the life or the soul has distinct application, in our Lord's words, primarily to corporeal safety and preservation in the midst of dangers; and, still further, to note the emphatic in your patience, as suggesting not only a future but a present acquisition of one's own soul, or life, as the result of such persevering endurance and enduring perseverance. All which things being kept in view, I may expand the great promise that lies in my text, as follows:-- First, by such persevering persistence in the Christian path, we gain ourselves. Self-surrender is self-possession. We never own ourselves till we have given up owning ourselves, and yielded ourselves to that Lord who gives us back saints to ourselves. Self-control is self-possession. We do not own ourselves as long as it is possible for any weakness in flesh, sense, or spirit to gain dominion over us and hinder us from doing what we know to be right. We are not our own masters then. Whilst they promise them liberty, they themselves are the bond-slaves of corruption. It is only when we have the bit well into the jaws of the brutes, and the reins tight in our hands, so that a finger-touch can check or divert the course, that we are truly lords of the chariot in which we ride and of the animals that impel it.

And such self-control which is the winning of ourselves is, as I believe, thoroughly realised only when, by self-surrender of ourselves to Jesus Christ, we get His help to govern ourselves and so become lords of ourselves. Some little petty Rajah, up in the hills, in a quasi-independent State in India, is troubled by mutineers whom he cannot subdue; what does he do? He sends a message down to Lahore or Calcutta, and up come English troops that consolidate his dominion, and he rules securely, when he has consented to become a feudatory, and recognise his overlord. And so you and I, by continual repetition, in the face of self and sin, of our acts of self-surrender, bring Christ into the field; and then, when we have said, Lord, take me; I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and when we daily, in spite of hindrances, stand to the surrender and repeat the consecration, then in our perseverance we acquire our souls.

Again, such persistence wins even the bodily life, whether it preserves it or loses it. I have said that the words of our texts have an application to bodily preservation in the midst of the dreadful dangers of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. But so regarded they are a paradox. For hear how the Master introduces them: Some of you shall they cause to be put to death, but there shall not a hair of your heads perish. In your perseverance ye shall win your lives. Some of you they will put to death, but ye shall win your lives,--a paradox which can only be solved by experience. Whether this bodily life be preserved or lost, it is gained when it is used as a means of attaining the higher life of union with God. Many a martyr had the promise, Not a hair of your head shall perish, fulfilled at the very moment when the falling axe shore his locks in twain, and severed his head from his body.

Finally, full salvation, the true possession of himself, and the acquisition of the life which really is life, comes to a man who perseveres to the end, and thus passes to the land where he will receive the recompense of the reward. The one moment the runner, with flushed cheek and forward swaying body, hot, with panting breath, and every muscle strained, is straining to the winning-post; and the next moment, in utter calm, he is wearing the crown.

To the end, and what a contrast the next moment will be! Brethren, may it be true of you and of me that we are not of them that draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the winning of their souls!