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

**PSALMS-012**. **THE GOD WHO DWELLS WITH MEN by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"7.* *Lift up your heads, O ye gates: and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. 8. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. 9. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. 10. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory."*

*Psalm 24:7-10*

This whole psalm was probably composed at the time of the bringing of the ark into the city of Zion. The former half was chanted as the procession wound its way up the hillside. It mainly consists of the answer to the question Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? and describes the kind of men that dwell with God, and the way by which they obtain their purity.

This second half of our psalm is probably to be thought of as being chanted when the procession had reached the summit of the hill and stood before the barred gates of the ancient Jebusite city. It is mainly in answer to the question, Who is this King of Glory? and is the description of the God that dwells with men, and the meaning of His dwelling with them.

We are to conceive of a couple of half choirs, the one within, the other without the mountain hold. The advancing choir summons the gates to open in the grand words: Lift up your heads, O ye gates! even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in. Their lofty lintels are too low for His head to pass beneath; so they have to be lifted that He may find entrance. They are everlasting doors, grey with antiquity, hoary with age. They have looked down, perhaps, upon Melchizedek, King of Salem, as he went forth in the morning twilight of history to greet the patriarch. But in all the centuries they have never seen such a King as this King of Glory, the true King of Israel who now desires entrance.

The answer to the summons comes from the choir within. Who is this King of Glory? the question represents ignorance and possible hesitation, as if the pagan inhabitants of the recently conquered city knew nothing of the God of Israel, and recognised no authority in His name. Of course, the dramatic form of question and answer is intended to give additional force to the proclamation as by God Himself of the Covenant name, the proper name of Israel's God, as Baal was the name of the Canaanite's God, the Lord strong and mighty; the Lord mighty in battle, by whose warrior power David had conquered the city, which now was summoned to receive its conqueror. Therefore the summons is again rung out, Lift up your heads, O ye gates! and the King of Glory shall come in. And once more, to express the lingering reluctance, ignorance not yet dispelled, suspicion and unwilling surrender, the dramatic question is repeated, Who is this King of Glory? The answer is sharp and authoritative in its brevity, and we may fancy it shouted with a full-throated burst--The Lord of Hosts, who, as Captain, commands all the embattled energies of earth and heaven conceived as a disciplined army. That great name, like a charge of dynamite, bursts the gates of brass asunder, and with triumphant music the procession sweeps into the conquered city.

Now these great words, throbbing with the enthusiasm at once of poetry and of devotion, may, I think, teach us a great deal if we ponder them.

**I. Notice, first, their application, their historical and original application, to the King who dwelt with Israel.**

We must never forget that in the Old Testament we have to do with an incomplete and a progressive revelation, and that if we would understand its significance, we must ever endeavour to ascertain to what point in that progress the words before us belong. We are not to read into these words New Testament depth and fulness of meaning; we are to take them and try to find out what they meant to David and to his people; and so we shall get a firm basis for any deeper significance which we may hereafter see in them. The thought of God, then, in these words is mainly that of a God of strong and victorious energy, a warrior-God, a conquering King, one whose word is power, who rules amidst the armies of heaven, and amidst the inhabitants of earth.

A brief consideration of each expression is all which can be attempted here. Who is this King of Glory? The first idea, then, is that of sovereign rule; the idea which had become more and more plain and clear to the national consciousness of the Hebrew with the installation of monarchy amongst them. And it is very beautiful to see how David lays hold of that thought of God being Himself the King of Israel; and dwells so often in his psalms on the idea that he, poor, pale, earthly shadow, is but a representative and a viceroy of the true King who sits in the heavens. He takes off his crown and lays it before His throne and says: Thou art the King of Israel, the King of Glory.

The Old Testament meaning of that word glory is a great deal more definite than the ordinary religious use of it amongst us. The glory of God in the Old Testament is, first and foremost, the supernatural light that dwelt between the cherubim and was the manifestation and symbol of the divine Presence. And next it is the sum total of all the impression made upon the world by God's manifestation of Himself, the Light, of which the material and supernatural light between the cherubs was but the emblem; all by which God flames and flashes Himself upon the trembling and thankful heart; that glory which is substantially the same as the Name of the Lord. And in this brightness, lustrous and dark with excess of light, this King dwells. The splendour of His regalia is the brightness that emanates from Himself. He is the King of Glory.

Next, we have the great Name, the Lord, Jehovah, which speaks of timeless, independent, unchanging, self-sufficing being. It declares that He is His own cause, His own law, His own impulse, the staple from which all the links of the chain of being depend, and not Himself a link, the fontal Source of all which is.

We say: I am that which I have become; I am that which I have been made; I am that which I have inherited; I am that which circumstances and example and training have shaped me to be. God says: I AM THAT I AM. This name is also significant, not only because it proclaims absolute, independent, underived, timeless being, but because it is the Covenant name, and speaks of the God who has come into fellowship with men, and has bound Himself to a certain course of action for their blessing, and is thus the Lord of Israel, and the God, in a special manner, of His people.

The Lord mighty in battle. A true warrior-God, who went out in no metaphorical sense, but in prose reality, fought for His people and subdued the nations under them, in order that His name might be spread and His glory be known in the earth.

And then, still further, the Lord of Hosts, the Captain of all the armies of heaven and earth. In that name is the thought to which the modern world is coming so slowly by scientific paths, that all being is one ordered whole, subject to the authority of one Lord. And in addition to that, the grander thought, that the unity of nature is the will of God; and that as the Commander issues His orders over all the field, so He speaks and it is done. The hosts are the angels of whom it is said: Bless the Lord all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His that do His pleasure. The hosts are the stars that fill the nightly heavens, of whom it is said, He bringeth out their host by number. The hosts are all creatures that live and are; and all are the soldiers and servants of this conquering King. Such is the name of the Lord that dwelt with Israel, the great conception that rises before this Psalmist.

**II. Now turn to the second application of these great words, that speak to us not only of the God that dwelt in Zion in outward and symbolical form, by means of a material Presence which was an emblem of the true nearness of Israel's God, but yet more distinctly, as I take it, of the Christ that dwells with men.**

The devout hearts in Israel felt that there was something more needed than this dwelling of Jehovah within an earthly Temple, and the process of revelation familiarised them with the thought that there was to be in the future a coming of the Lord in some special manner unknown to them. So that the whole anticipation and forward look of the Old Testament system is gathered into and expressed by almost its last words, which prophesy that the Lord shall suddenly come to His Temple, and that once again this King of Glory shall stand before the everlasting gates and summon them to open.

And when was that fulfilled? Fulfilled in a fashion that at first sight seems the greatest contrast to all this vision of grandeur, of warlike strength, of imperial power and rule with which we have been dealing; but which yet was not the contrast to these ideas so much as the highest embodiment of them. For, although at first sight it seems as if there could be no greater contrast than between the lion might of the Jehovah of the Old Testament, and the lamb gentleness of the Jesus of the New, if we look more closely we shall see that it is not a relation of contrast that exists between the two. Christ is all, and more than all, that this psalm proclaimed the Jehovah of the Old Covenant to be. Let us look again from that point of view at the particulars already referred to.

He is the highest manifestation of the divine rule and authority. There is no dominion like the dominion of the loving Christ, a kingdom based upon suffering and wielded in gentleness, a kingdom of which the crown is a wreath of thorns, and the sceptre a rod of reed; a dominion which is all exercised for the blessing of its subjects, and which, therefore, is an everlasting dominion. There is no rule like that; no height of divine authority towers so high as the authority of Him who rules us so absolutely because He gave Himself for us utterly. This is the King, the Prince of the kings of the earth, because this is the Incarnate God who died for us.

Christ is the highest raying out of the divine Light, or, as the Epistle to the Hebrews calls it, the effulgence of His glory. The true glory of God lies in His love, and of that love Christ is the noblest and most wondrous example. So all other beams of the divine character, bright as their light is, are but dim as compared with the sevenfold lustre of the light that shines from the gentle loving-kindness of the heart of Christ. He has glorified God because He shows us that the divinest thing in God is love.

For the same reason, He is the mightiest exhibition of the divine power--the Lord strong and mighty. There is no work of God's hand, no work of God's will so great as that by which we are turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. The Cross is God's noblest revelation of power; and in Him, His weakness, His surrender, His death, with all the wonderful energies that flow from that death for man's salvation, we see the divine strength made perfect in the human weakness of Jesus. The Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. There is divine power in its noblest form, in the paradoxical shape of a dying man; in its noblest effect, salvation; in its widest sweep to all who believe.

'Twas great to speak a world from nought,

'Tis greater to redeem.

This strong Son of God is the arm of the Lord in whom live and act the energies of omnipotence.

Christ is the Lord mighty in battle. True, He is the Prince of peace, but He is also the better Joshua, the victorious Captain, in whom dwells the conquering divine might. Through all the gentleness of His life there winds a martial strain, and it is not in vain that the Evangelist who was most deeply penetrated by the sweetness of His love, is the one who most often speaks of Him as overcoming, and who has preserved as His last words to His timid followers, that triumphant command, Be of good cheer! I have overcome the world. He has conquered for us, binding the strong man, and so He will spoil his house. Sin, hell, death, the devil, law, fear, our own foolish hearts, all temptations that hover around us--they are all vanquished foes of a Lord that is mighty in battle. And as He overcame, so shall we if we will trust Him.

Christ is the Commander and Wielder of all the forces of the universe. As one said to Him in the days of His flesh, I am a man under authority, and I say to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. So do Thou speak and Thy word shall be sovereign. And so it was. He spake to diseases and they vanished. He spake to the winds and the seas and there was a great calm. He spake to demons, and murmuring, but yet obedient, they came out of their victims. He flung His word into the recesses of the grave, and Lazarus came forth, fumbling with the knots on his grave-clothes, and stumbling into the light. He spake and it was done. Who is He, the utterance of whose will is sovereign amongst all the regions of being? Who is the King of Glory? Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ! Thou art the Everlasting Son of the Father.

**III. And now, lastly, let me ask you to look, and that for a moment, at the application of these words to the Christ who will dwell in our hearts.**

His historical manifestation here upon earth and His Incarnation, which is the true dwelling of Deity amongst men, are not enough. They have left something more than a memory to the world. He is as ready to abide as really within our spirits as He was to tabernacle upon earth amongst men. And the very central message of that Gospel which Is proclaimed to us all is this, that if we will open the gates of our hearts He will come in, in all the plenitude of His victorious power, and dwell in our hearts, their Conqueror and their King.

What a strange contrast, and yet what a close analogy there is between the victorious tones and martial air of this summons of my text. Lift up your heads, O ye gates! that the King of Glory may come in, and the gentle words of the Apocalypse: Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him. But He that in the Old Covenant arrayed in warrior arms, summoned the rebels to surrender, is the same as He who, in the New, with the night-dews in His hair, and patience on His face, and gentleness in the touch of His hand upon the door, waits to enter in. Brethren! open your hearts, and the King of Glory shall come in.

And He will come in as a king that might seek to enter some city far away on the outposts of his kingdom, besieged by his enemies. If the King comes in, the city will be impregnable. If you open your hearts for Him He will come and keep you from all your foes and give you the victory over them all. So, to every hard-pressed heart, waging an unequal contest with toils and temptations, and sorrows and sins, this great hope is given, that Christ the Victor will come in His power to garrison heart and mind. As of old the encouragement was given to Hezekiah in his hour of peril, when the might of Sennacherib insolently threatened Jerusalem, so the same stirring assurances are given to each who admits Christ's succours to his heart--He shall not come into this city, for I will defend this city to save it for Mine own sake Open your hearts and the conquering King will come in.

And do not forget that there is another possible application of these words lying in the future, to the conquering Christ who shall come again. The whole history of the past points onwards to yet a last time when the Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, and predicts that Christ shall so come in like manner as He went up to heaven. Again will the summons ring out. Again will He come arrayed in flashing brightness, and the visible robes of His imperial majesty. Again will He appear, mighty in battle, when in righteousness He shall judge and make war. For a Christian, one great memory fills the past--Christ has come; and one great hope brightens the else waste future--Christ will come. That hope has been far too much left to be cherished only by those who hold a particular opinion as to the chronology of unfulfilled prophecy. But it should be to every Christian heart the blessed hope, even the appearing of the glory of Him who has come in the past. He is with and in us, in the present. He will come in the future in His glory, and shall sit upon the throne of His glory. All our pardon and hope of God's love depend upon that great fact in the past, that the Lord was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory. Our purity which will fit us to dwell with God, our present blessedness, all our power for daily strife, and our companionship in daily loneliness, depend on the present fact that He dwells in our hearts by faith, the seed of all good, and the conquering Antagonist of every evil. And the one light which fills the future with hope, peaceful because assured, streams from that most sure promise that He will come again, sweeping from the highest heavens, on His head the many crowns of universal monarchy, in His hand the weapons of all-conquering power, and none shall need to ask, Who is this King of Glory? for every eye shall know Him, the Judge upon His throne, to be the Christ of the Cross. Open the doors of your hearts to Him, as He sues for entrance now in the meekness of His patient love, that on you may fall in that day of the coming of the King, the blessing of the servants who wait for their returning Lord, that when He cometh and knocketh, they may open unto Him immediately.