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

**PSALMS-019**. **INTO THY HANDS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Into Thine hand I commit my spirit: Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth."*

*Psalm 31:5*

The first part of this verse is consecrated for ever by our Lord's use of it on the Cross. Is it not wonderful that, at that supreme hour, He deigned to take an unknown singer's words as His words? What an honour to that old saint that Jesus Christ, dying, should find nothing that more fully corresponded to His inmost heart at that moment than the utterance of the Psalmist long ago! How His mind must have been saturated with the Old Testament and with these songs of Israel! And do you not think it would be better for us if ours were completely steeped in those heart-utterances of ancient devotion?

But, of course, the Psalmist was not thinking about his death. It was an act for his life that he expressed in these words:--Into Thine hands I commit my spirit. If you will glance over the psalm at your leisure, you will see that it is the heart-cry of a man in great trouble, surrounded by all sorts of difficulties, with his very life threatened. He was down in the very depths of darkness, and ringed about by all sorts of enemies at that moment, not sitting comfortably, as you and I are here, but in the midst of the hurly-burly and the strife, when by a dead lift of faith he flung himself clean out of his disasters, and, if I might so say, pitched himself into the arms of God. Into Thine hands I commit my spirit, as a man standing in the midst of enemies, and bearing some precious treasure in his hand might, with one strong cast of his arm, fling it into the open hand of some mighty helper, and so baulk the enemies of their prey. That is the figure.

**I. Now, let me say a word as to where to lodge a soul for safe keeping.**

Into Thine hands--a banker has a strong room, and a wise man sends his securities and his valuables to the bank and takes an acknowledgment, and goes to bed at night, quite sure that no harm will come to them, and that he will get them when he wants them. And that is exactly what the Psalmist does here. He deposits his most precious treasure in the safe custody of One who will take care of it. The great Hand is stretched out, and the little soul is put into it. It closes, and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand.

Now that is only a picturesque way of putting the most threadbare, bald, commonplace of religious teaching. The word faith, when it has any meaning at all in people's minds when they hear it from the pulpit, is extremely apt, I fear, to create a kind of, if not disgust, at least a revulsion of feeling, as if people said, Ah, there he is at the old story again! But will you freshen up your notions of what faith it means by taking that picture of my text as I have tried to expand and illuminate it a little by my metaphor? That is what is meant by Into Thy hands I commit my spirit. There are two or three ways in which that is to be done, and one or two ways in which it is not to be done.

We do it when we trust Him for the salvation of our souls. There are a great many good Christian people who go mourning all their days, or, at least, sometimes mourning and sometimes indifferent. The most that they venture to say is, But I cannot be sure. Our grandfathers used to sing:--

'Tis a point I long to know,

Oft it causes anxious thought.

Why should it cause anxious thought? Take your own personal salvation for granted, and work from that. Do not work towards it. If you have gone to Christ and said, Lord, I cannot save myself; save me. I am willing to be saved, be sure that you have the salvation that you ask, and that if you have put your soul in that fashion into God's hands, any incredible thing is credible, and any impossible thing is possible, rather than that you should fail of the salvation which, in the bottom of your hearts, you desire. Take the burden off your backs and put it on His. Do not be for ever questioning yourselves, Am I a saved man? You will get sick of that soon, and you will be very apt to give up all thought about the matter at all. But take your stand on the fact, and with emancipated and buoyant hearts, and grateful ones, work from it, and because of it. And when sin rises up in your soul, and you say to yourselves, If I were a Christian I could not have done that, or, If I were a Christian I could not be so-and-so; remember that all sin is inconsistent with being a Christian, but no sin is incompatible with it; and that after all the consciousness of shortcomings and failure, we have just to come back to the old point, and throw ourselves on God's love. His arms are open to clasp us round. Into Thy hands I commit my spirit.

Further, the Psalmist meant, by committing himself to God, trusting Him in reference to daily life, and all its difficulties and duties. Our act of trust is to run through everything that we undertake and everything that we have to fight with. Self-will wrenches our souls out of God's hands. A man who sends his securities to the banker can get them back when he likes. And if we undertake to manage our own affairs, or fling ourselves into our work without recognition of our dependence upon Him, or if we choose our work without seeking to know what His will is, that is recalling our deposit. Then you will get it back again, because God does not keep anybody's securities against his will--you will get it back again, and much good it will do you when you have got it! Self-will, self-reliance, self-determination--these are the opposites of committing the keeping of our souls to God. And, as I say, if you withdraw the deposit, you take all the burden and trouble of it on your own shoulders again. Do not fancy that you are living lives of faith in the Son of God, if you are not looking to Him to settle what you are to do. You cannot expect that He will watch over you, if you do not ask Him where you are to go.

But now there is another thing that I would suggest, this committing of ourselves to God which begins with the initial act of trust in Him for the salvation of our souls, and is continued throughout life by the continual surrender of ourselves to Him, is to be accompanied with corresponding work. The Apostle Peter's memory is evidently hovering round this verse, whether he is consciously quoting it or not, when he says, Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in welldoing, which has to go along with the act of trust and dependence. There must come the continual ordering of the life in accordance with His will; for well-doing does not mean merely some works of beneficence and charity, of the sort that have monopolised to themselves the name in latter days, but it means the whole of righteous conduct in accordance with the will of God.

So Peter tells us that it is vain for us to talk about committing the keeping of our soul to God unless we back up the committing with consistent, Christlike lives. Of course it is vain. How can a man expect God to take care of him when he plunges himself into something that is contrary to God's laws? There are many people who say, God will take care of me; He will save me from the consequences. Not a bit of it--He loves us a great deal too well for that. If you take the bit between your teeth, you will be allowed to go over the precipice and be smashed to pieces. If you wish to be taken care of, keep within the prescribed limits, and consult Him before you act, and do not act till you are sure of His approval. God has never promised to rescue man when he has got into trouble by his own sin. Suppose a servant had embezzled his master's money through gambling, and then expected God to help him to get the money to pay back into the till. Do you think that would be likely to work? And how dare you anticipate that God will keep your feet, if you are walking in ways of your own choosing? All sin takes a man out from the shelter of the divine protection, and the shape the protection has to take then is chastisement. And all sin makes it impossible for a man to exercise that trust which is the committing of his soul to God. So it has to be in welldoing, and the two things are to go together. What God hath joined let not man put asunder. You do not become a Christian by the simple exercise of trust unless it is trust that worketh by love.

But let me remind you, further, that this committing of our souls into God's hands does not mean that we are absolved from taking care of them ourselves. There is a very false kind of religious faith, which seems to think that it shuffles off all responsibility upon God. Not at all; you lighten the responsibility, but you do not get rid of it. And no man has a right to say He will keep me, and so I may neglect diligent custody of myself. He keeps us very largely by helping us to keep our hearts with all diligence, and to keep our feet in the way of truth.

**II. So let me now just say a word in regard to the blessedness of thus living in an atmosphere of continual dependence on, and reference to, God, about great things and little things.**

Whenever a man is living by trust, even when the trust is mistaken, or when it is resting upon some mere human, fallible creature like himself, the measure of his confidence is the measure of his tranquillity. You know that when a child says, I do not need to mind, father will look after that, he may be right or wrong in his estimate of his father's ability and inclination; but as long as he says it, he has no kind of trouble or anxiety, and the little face is scarred by no deep lines of care or thought. So when we turn to Him and say, Why should I the burden bear? then there comes--I was going to say surging, but trickling is a better word--into my heart a settled peacefulness which nothing else can give. Look at this psalm. It begins, and for the first half continues, in a very minor key. The singer was not a poet posing as in affliction, but his words were wrung out of him by anguish. Mine eyes are consumed with grief; my life is spent with grief; I am ... as a dead man out of mind; I am in trouble. And then with a quick wheel about, But I trusted in Thee, O Lord! I said, Thou art my God. And what comes of that? This--O how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee! Blessed be the Lord, for He hath showed me His marvellous kindness in a strong city. And then, at the end of all, his peacefulness is so triumphant that he calls upon all His saints to help him to praise. And the last words are Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart. That is what you will get if you commit your soul to God. There was no change in the Psalmist's circumstances. The same enemy was round about him. The same net was privily laid for him. All that had seemed to him half an hour before as wellnigh desperate, continued utterly unaltered. But what had altered? God had come into the place, and that altered the whole aspect of matters. Instead of looking with shrinking and tremulous heart along the level of earth, where miseries were, he was looking up into the heavens, where God was; and so everything was beautiful. That will be our experience if we will commit the keeping of our souls to Him in well doing. You can bring June flowers and autumn fruits into snowy January days by the exercise of this trust in God. It does not need that our circumstances should alter, but only that our attitude should alter. Look up, and cast your souls into God's hands, and all that is round you, of disasters and difficulties and perplexities, will suffer transformation; and for sorrow there will come joy because there has come trust.

I need not say a word about the other application of this verse, which, as I have said, is consecrated to us by our Lord's own use of it at the last. But is it not beautiful to think that the very same act of mind and heart by which a man commits his spirit to God in life may be his when he comes to die, and that death may become a voluntary act, and the spirit may not be dragged out of us, reluctant, and as far as we can, resisting, but that we may offer it up as a libation, to use one metaphor of St. Paul's, or may surrender it willingly as an act of faith? It is wonderful to think that life and death, so unlike each other, may be made absolutely identical in the spirit in which they are met. You remember how the first martyr caught up the words from the Cross, and kneeling down outside the wall of Jerusalem, with the blood running from the wounds that the stones had made, said, Lord Jesus! receive my spirit. That is the way to die, and that is the way to live.

One word is all that time permits about the ground upon which this great venture of faith may be made. Thou hast redeemed me, Lord God of Truth. The Psalmist, I think, uses that word redeemed here, not in its wider spiritual New Testament sense, but in its frequent Old Testament sense, of deliverance from temporal difficulties and calamities. And what he says is, in effect, this: I have had experience in the past which makes me believe that Thou wilt extricate me from this trouble too, because Thou art the God of Truth. He thinks of what God has done, and of what God is. And Peter, whom we have already found echoing this text, echoes that part of it too, for he says, Let them commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator, which is all but parallel to Lord God of Truth. So God will continue as He has begun, and finish what He has begun.

A faithful Creator-- He made us to need what we do need, and He is not going to forget the wants that He Himself has incorporated with our human nature. He is bound to help us because He made us. He is the God of Truth, and He will help us. But if we take redeemed in its highest sense, the Psalmist, arguing from God's past mercy and eternal faithfulness, is saying substantially what the Apostle said in the triumphant words, Whom He did foreknow, them He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son ... and whom He did predestinate them He also ... justified, and whom He justified them He also glorified. Thou hast redeemed me. Thou art the God of Truth; Thou wilt not lift Thy hand away from Thy work until Thou hast made me all that Thou didst bind Thyself to make me in that initial act of redeeming me.

So we can say, He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? You have experiences, I have no doubt, in your past, on which you may well build confidence for the future. Let each of us consult our own hearts, and our own memories. Cannot we say, Thou hast been my Help, and ought we not therefore to be sure that He will not leave us nor forsake us until He manifests Himself as the God of our salvation?

It is a blessed thing to lay ourselves in the hands of God, but the New Testament tells us, It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. The alternative is one that we all have to face,--either into Thy hands I commit my spirit, or into those hands to fall. Settle which of the two is to be your fate.