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

**PSALMS-027**. **WHAT MEN FIND BENEATH THE WINGS OF GOD by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"8. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures. 9. For with Thee is the fountain of life: in Thy light shall we see light."*

*Psalm 36:8-9*

In the preceding verses we saw a wonderful picture of the boundless perfections of God; His lovingkindness, faithfulness, righteousness, and of His twofold act, the depths of His judgments and the plainness of His merciful preservation of man and beast. In these verses we have an equally wonderful picture of the blessedness of the godly, the elements of which consist in four things: satisfaction, represented under the emblem of a feast; joy, represented under the imagery of full draughts from a flowing river of delight; life, pouring from God as a fountain; light, streaming from Him as source.

And this picture is connected with the previous one by a very simple link. Who are they who shall be abundantly satisfied? The men who put their trust beneath the shadow of Thy wings. That is to say, the simple exercise of confidence in God is the channel through which all the fulness of divinity passes into and fills our emptiness.

Observe, too, that the whole of the blessings here promised are to be regarded as present and not future. They shall be abundantly satisfied would be far more truly rendered in consonance with the Hebrew: They are satisfied; and so also we should read Thou dost make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures; in Thy light do we see light. The Psalmist is not speaking of any future blessedness, to be realised in some far-off, indefinite day to come, but of what is possible even in this cloudy and sorrowful life. My text was true on the hills of Palestine, on the day when it was spoken; it may be true amongst the alleys of Manchester to-day. My purpose at this time is simply to deal with the four elements in which this blessedness consists--satisfaction, joy, life, light.

**I. Satisfaction: They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house.**

Now, I suppose, there is a double metaphor in that. There is an allusion, no doubt, to the festal meal of priests and worshippers in the Temple, on occasion of the peace-offering, and there is also the simpler metaphor of God as the Host at His table, at which we are guests. Thy house may either be, in the narrower sense, the Temple; and then all life is represented as being a glad sacrificial meal in His presence, of which the meek shall eat and be satisfied, or Thy house may be taken in a more general sense; and then all life is represented as the gathering of children round the abundant board which their Father's providence spreads for them, and as glad feasting in the mansions of the Father's house.

In either case the plain teaching of the text is, that by the might of a calm trust in God the whole mass of a man's desires are filled and satisfied. What do we want to satisfy us? It is something almost awful to think of the multiplicity, and the variety, and the imperativeness of the raging desires which every human soul carries about within it. The heart is like a nest of callow fledglings, every one of them a great, wide open, gaping beak, that ever needs to have food put into it. Heart, mind, will, appetites, tastes, inclinations, weaknesses, bodily wants--the whole crowd of these are crying for their meat. The Book of Proverbs says there are three things that are never satisfied: the grave, the earth that is not filled with water, and the fire that never says, It is enough. And we may add a fourth, the human heart, insatiable as the grave; thirsty as the sands, on which you may pour Niagara, and it will drink it all up and be ready for more; fierce as the fire that licks up everything within reach and still hungers.

So, though we be poor and weak creatures, we want much to make us restful. We want no less than that every appetite, desire, need, inclination shall be filled to the full; that all shall be filled to the full at once, and that by one thing; that all shall be filled to the full at once, by one thing that shall last for ever. Else we shall be like men whose store of provision gives out before they are half-way across the desert. And we need that all our desires shall be filled at once by one thing that is so much greater than ourselves that we shall grow up towards it, and towards it, and towards it, and yet never be able to exhaust or surpass it.

Where are you going to get that? There is only one answer, dear brethren! to the question, and that is--God, and God alone is the food of the heart; God, and God alone, will satisfy your need. Let us bring the full Christian truth to bear upon the illustration of these words. Who was it that said, I am the Bread of Life. He that cometh unto Me shall never hunger? Christ will feed my mind with truth if I will accept His revelation of Himself, of God, and of all things. Christ will feed my heart with love if I will open my heart for the entrance of His love. Christ will feed my will with blessed commands if I will submit myself to His sweet and gentle, and yet imperative, authority. Christ will satisfy all my longings and desires with His own great fulness. Other food palls upon man's appetite, and we wish for change; and physiologists tell us that a less wholesome and nutritious diet, if varied, is better for a man's health than a more nutritious one if uniform and monotonous. But in Christ there are all constituents that are needed for the building up of the human spirit, and so we never weary of Him if we only know His sweetness. After a world of hungry men have fed upon Him, He remains inexhaustible as at the beginning; like the bread in His own miracles, of which the pieces that were broken and ready to be given to the eaters were more than the original stock, as it appeared when the meal began, or like the fabled feast in the Norse Walhalla, to which the gods sit down to-day, and to-morrow it is all there on the board, as abundant and full as ever. So if we have Christ to live upon, we shall know no hunger; and in the days of famine we shall be satisfied.

O brethren! have you ever known what it is to feel that your hungry heart is at rest? Did you ever know what it is to say, It is enough? Have you anything that satisfies your appetite and makes you blessed? Surely, men's eager haste to get more of the world's dainties shows that there is no satisfaction at its table. Why will you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not, as Indians in famine eat clay which fills their stomachs, but neither stays hunger, nor ministers strength? Eat and your soul shall live.

**II. Now, turn to the next of the elements of blessedness here--Joy. Thou makest them drink of the river of Thy pleasures.**

There may be a possible reference here, couched in the word pleasures, to the Garden of Eden, with the river that watered it parting into four heads; for Eden is the singular of the word which is here translated pleasures or delight. If we take that reference, which is very questionable, there would be suggested the thought that amidst all the pain and weariness of this desert life of ours, though the gates of Paradise are shut against us, they who dwell beneath the shadow of the divine wing really have a paradise blooming around them; and have flowing ever by their side, with tinkling music, the paradisaical river of delights, in which they may bathe and swim, and of which they may drink. Certainly the joys of communion with God surpass any which unfallen Eden could have boasted.

But, at all events, the plain teaching of the text is that the simple act of trusting beneath the shadow of God's wings brings to us an ever fresh and flowing river of gladness, of which we may drink. The whole conception of religion in the Bible is gladsome. There is no puritanical gloom about it. True, a Christian man has sources of sadness which other men have not. There is the consciousness of his own sin, and the contest that he has daily to wage; and all things take a soberer colouring to the eye that has been accustomed to look, however dimly, upon God. Many of the sources of earthly felicity are dammed up and shut off from us if we are living beneath the shadow of God's wings. Life will seem to be sterner, and graver, and sadder than the lives that ring with idiot laughter solely, and have no music because they have no melancholy in them. That cannot be helped. But what does it matter though two or three surface streams, which are little better than drains for sewage, be stopped up, if the pure river of the water of life is turned into your hearts? Surely it will be a gain if the sadness which has joy for its very foundation is yours, instead of the laughter which is only a mocking mask for a death's head, and of which it is true that even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness. Better to be sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, than to be glad on the surface, with a perpetual sorrow and unrest gnawing at the root of your life.

And if it be true that the whole Biblical conception of religion is of a glad thing, then, my brother! it is your duty, if you are a Christian man, to be glad, whatever temptations there may be in your way to be sorrowful. It is a hard lesson, and one which is not always insisted upon. We hear a great deal about other Christian duties. We do not hear so much as we ought about the Christian duty of gladness. It takes a very robust faith to say, Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation, but unless we can say it, there is an attainment of Christian life yet unreached, to which we have to aspire.

But be that as it may, my point is simply this--that all real and profound possession of, and communion with, God in Christ will make us glad; glad with a gladness altogether unlike that of the world round about us, far deeper, far quieter, far nobler, the sister and the ally of all great things, of all pure life, of all generous and lofty thought. And where is it to be found? Only in fellowship with Him. The river of Thy pleasures may mean something yet more solemn and wonderful than pleasures of which He is the Author. It may mean pleasures which He shares, the very delights of the divine nature itself. The more we come into fellowship with Him, the more shall we share in the very joy of God Himself. And what is His joy? He delights in mercy; He delights in self-communication: He is the blessed, the happy God, because He is the giving God. He delights in His love. He rejoices over His penitent child with singing, In that blessedness we may share; or if that be too high and mystical a thought, may we not remember who it was that said: These things speak I unto you that My joy may remain in you; and who it is that will one day say to the faithful servant: Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord? Christ makes us drink of the river of His pleasures. The Shepherd and the sheep drink from the same stream, and the gladness which filled the heart of the Man of Sorrows, and lay deeper than all His sorrows, He imparts to all them that put their trust in Him.

So, dear brethren! what a blessing it is for us to have, as we may have, a source of joy, frozen by no winter, dried up by no summer, muddied and corrupted by no iridescent scum of putrefaction which ever mantles over the stagnant ponds of earthly joys! Like some citadel that has an unfailing well in its courtyard, we may have a fountain of gladness within ourselves which nothing that touches the outside can cut off. We have but to lap a hasty mouthful of earthly joys as we run, but we cannot drink too full draughts of this pure river of water which makes glad the city of God.

**III. We have the third element of the blessedness of the godly represented under the metaphor of Life, pouring from the fountain, which is God. With Thee is the fountain of life.**

The words are true in regard to the lowest meaning of life--physical existence--and they give a wonderful idea of the connection between God and all living creatures. The fountain rises, the spray on the summit catches the sunlight for a moment, and then falls into the basin, jet after jet springing up into the light, and in its turn recoiling into the darkness. The water in the fountain, the water in the spray, the water in the basin, are all one. Wherever there is life there is God. The creature is bound to the Creator by a mystic bond and tie of kinship, by the fact of life. The mystery of life knits all living things with God. It is a spark, wherever it burns, from the central flame. It is a drop, wherever it is found, from the great fountain. It is in man the breath of God's nostrils. It is not a gift given by a Creator who dwells apart, having made living things, as a watchmaker might a watch, and then seeing them go. But there is a deep mystic union between the God who has life in Himself and all the living creatures who draw their life from Him, which we cannot express better than by that image of our text, With Thee is the fountain of life.

But my text speaks about a blessing belonging to the men who put their trust under the shadow of God's wing, and therefore it does not refer merely to physical existence, but to something higher than that, namely, to that life of the spirit in communion with God, which is the true and the proper sense of life; the one, namely, in which the word is almost always used in the Bible.

There is such a thing as death in life; living men may be dead in trespasses and sins, dead in pleasure, dead in selfishness. The awful vision of Coleridge in the Ancient Mariner, of dead men standing up and pulling at the ropes, is only a picture of the realities of life; where, as on some Witches Sabbath, corpses move about and take part in the activities of this dead world. There are people full of energy in regard of worldly things, who yet are all dead to that higher region, the realities of which they have never seen, the actions of which they have never done, the emotions of which they have never felt. Am I speaking to such living corpses now? There are some of my audience alive to the world, alive to animalism, alive to lust, alive to passion, alive to earth, alive perhaps to thought, alive to duty, alive to conduct of a high and noble kind, but yet dead to God, and, therefore, dead to the highest and noblest of all realities. Answer for yourselves the question--do you belong to this class?

There is life for you in Jesus Christ, who is the Life. Like the great aqueducts that stretch from the hills across the Roman Campagna, His Incarnation brings the waters of the fountain from the mountains of God into the lower levels of our nature, and the fetid alleys of our sins. The cool, sparkling treasure is carried near to every lip. If we drink, we live. If we will not, we die in our sins, and are dead whilst we live. Stop the fountain, and what becomes of the stream? It fades there between its banks, and is no more. You cannot even live the animal life except that life were joined to Him. If it could be broken away from God it would disappear as the clouds melt in the sky, and there would be nobody, and you would be nowhere. You cannot break yourself away from God physically so completely as to annihilate yourself. You can do so spiritually, and some of you do it, and the consequence is that you are dead, dead, DEAD! You can be made alive from the dead, if you will lay hold on Jesus Christ, and get His life-giving Spirit into your hearts.

**IV. Light. In Thy light shall we see light.**

God is the Father of lights. The sun and all the stars are only lights kindled by Him. It is the very crown of revelation that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. Light seems to the unscientific eye, which knows nothing about undulations of a luminiferous ether, to be the least material of material things. All joyous things come with it. It brings warmth and fruit, fulness and life. Purity, and gladness, and knowledge have been symbolised by it in all tongues. The Scripture uses light, and the sun, which is its source, as an emblem for God in His holiness, and blessedness, and omniscience. This great word here seems to point chiefly to light as knowledge.

This saying is true, as the former clause was, in relation to all the light which men have. The inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. The faculties by which men know, and all the exercise of those faculties, are His gift. It is in the measure in which God's light comes to the eye that the eye beholds. Light may mean not only the faculty, but the medium of vision. It is in the measure in which God's light comes, and because His light comes, that all light of reason in human nature sees the truth which is its light. God is the Author of all true thoughts in all mankind. The spirit of man is a candle kindled by the Lord.

But as I said about life, so I say about light. The material or intellectual aspects of the word are not the main ones here. The reference is to the spiritual gift which belongs to the men who put their trust beneath the shadow of Thy wings. In communion with Him who is the Light as well as the Life of men, we see a whole universe of glories, realities, and brightnesses. Where other eyes see only darkness, we behold the King in His beauty, and the land that is very far off. Where other men see only cloudland and mists, our vision will pierce into the unseen, and there behold the things which are, the only real things, of which all that the eye of sense sees are only the fleeting shadows, seen as in a dream, while these are the true, and the sight of them is sight indeed. They who see by the light of God, and see light therein, have a vision which is more than imagination, more than opinion, more than belief. It is certitude. Communication with God does not bring with it superior intellectual perspicuity, but it does bring a perception of spiritual realities and relations, which, in respect of clearness and certainty, may be called sight. Many of us walk in darkness, who, if we were but in communion with God, would see the lone hillside blazing with chariots and horses of fire. Many of us grope in perplexity, who, if we were but hiding under the shadow of God's wings, would see the truth and walk at liberty in the light, which is knowledge and purity and joy.

In communication with God, we see light upon all the paths of duty. It is wonderful how, when a man lives near God, he gets to know what he ought to do. That great Light, which is Christ, is like the star that hung over the Magi, blazing in the heavens, and yet stooping to the lowly task of guiding three wayfaring men along a muddy road upon earth. So the highest Light of God comes down to be a lantern for our paths and a light for our feet.

And in the same communion with God, we get light in all seasons of darkness and of sorrow. To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness; and the darkest hours of earthly fortune will be like a Greenland summer night, when the sun scarcely dips below the horizon, and even when it is absent, all the heaven is aglow with a calm twilight.

All these great blessings belong to-day to those who take refuge under the shadow of His wings. But blessed as the present experience is, we have to look for the perfecting of it when we pass from the forecourt to the inner sanctuary, and in that higher house sit with Christ at His table and feast at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Here we drink from the river, but there we shall be carried up to the source. The life of God in the soul is here often feeble in its flow, a fountain sealed and all but shut up in our hearts, but there it will pour through all our being, a fountain springing up into everlasting life. The darkness is scattered even here by beams of the true light, but here we are only in the morning twilight, and many clouds still fill the sky, and many a deep gorge lies in sunless shadow, but there the light shall be a broad universal blaze, and there shall be nothing hid from the heat thereof.

Now, dear brethren! the sum of the whole matter is, that all this fourfold blessing of satisfaction, joy, life, light, is given to you, if you will take Christ. He will feed you with the bread of God; He will give you His own joy to drink; He will be in you the life of your lives, and the master-light of all your seeing. And if you will not have Him, you will starve, and your lips will be cracked with thirst; and you will live a life which is death, and you will sink at last into outer darkness.

Is that the fate which you are going to choose? Choose Christ, and He will give you satisfaction, and joy, and life, and light.