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

**PSALMS-043**. **THE FIXED HEART by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise."*

*Psalm 57:7*

It is easy to say such things when life goes smoothly with us. But this Psalmist, whether David or another, says this, and means it, when all things are dark and frowning around him. The superscription attributes the words to David himself, fleeing from Saul, and hiding in the cave. Whether that be so or no, the circumstances under which the Psalmist sings are obviously those of very great difficulty and oppression. But he sings himself into confidence and good cheer. In the dark he believes in the light. There are some flowers that give their perfumes after sunset and are sweetest when the night dews are falling. The true religious life is like these. A heart really based upon God, and at rest in Him, never breathes forth such fragrant and strong perfume as in the darkness of sorrow. The repetition of My heart is fixed adds emphasis to the expression of unalterable determination. The fixed heart is resolved to sing and give praise in spite of everything that might make sobs and tears choke the song.

**I. Note the fixed heart.**

The Hebrew uses the metaphor of the heart to cover a great deal more of the inward self than we are accustomed to do. We mainly mean thereby that in us which loves. But the Old Testament speaks of the thoughts and intents as well as the affections of the heart. And so to this Psalmist his heart was not only that in him which loved, but that which purposed and which thought. When he says My heart is fixed he does not merely mean that he is conscious of a steadfast love, but also and rather of a fixed and settled determination, and of an abiding communion of thought between himself and God. And he not only makes this declaration as the expression of his experience for the moment, but he mortgages the future, and in so far as any man dare, he ventures to say that this temper of entire consecration, of complete communion, of fixed resolve to cleave to God, which is his present mood, will be his future whatever may wait his outward life then. The lesson from that resolve is that our religion, if it is worth anything, must be a continuous and uniformly acting force throughout our whole lives, and not merely sporadic and spasmodic, by fits and starts. The lines that a child's unsteady and untrained hand draws in its copy-book are too good a picture of the crooked, wandering ways in which we live, in so far as our religion is concerned. The line should be firm and straight, uniform in breadth, unvarying in direction, like a sunbeam, homogeneous and equally tenacious like an iron rod. Unless it be thus strong and uniform, it will scarcely sustain the weights that it must bear, or resist the blows that it must encounter.

For a fixed heart I must have a fixed determination, and not a mere fluctuating and soon broken intention. I must have a steadfast affection, and not merely a fluttering love, that, like some butterfly, lights now on this, now on that, sweet flower, but which has a flight straight as a carrier pigeon to its cot, which shall bear me direct to God. And I must have a continuous realisation of my dependence upon God, and of God's sweet sufficiency, going with me all through the dusty day. A firm determination, a steadfast love, a constant thought, these at least are inculcated in the words of my text. My heart is fixed, O God! my heart is fixed.

Ah, brethren! how unlike the broken, interrupted, divergent lines that we draw! Our religious moments are not knit together, and touching one upon the other, but they are like the pools in the bed of a half dried up Australian stream--a pond here, and a stretch of white, blistering pebbles there, and then a little drop of water, and then another reach of dryness. They should all be knit together by one continuous flow of a fixed love, desire, and thought. Is our average Christianity fairly represented by such words as these of my text? Do they not rather make us burn with shame when we think that a man who lived in the twilight of God's revelation, and was weighed upon by distresses such as wrung this psalm out of him, should have poured out this resolve, which we who live in the sunlight and are flooded with blessings find it hard to echo with sincerity and truth? Fixed hearts are rare amongst the Christians of this day.

**II. Notice the manifold hindrances to such a uniformity of our religious life.**

They are formidable enough, God knows, we all know it, and I do not need to dwell upon them. There is, for example, the tendency to fluctuation which besets all our feelings, and especially our religious emotions. What would happen to a steam-engine if the stoker now piled on coals and then fell asleep by the furnace door? One moment the boiler would be ready to burst; at another moment there would be no steam to drive anything. That is the sort of alternation that goes on amongst hosts of Christians to-day. Their springtime and summer are followed certainly by an autumn and a bitter winter. Every moment of elevation has a corresponding moment of depression. They never catch a glimpse of God and of His love brighter and more sweet than ordinary without its being followed by long weariness and depression and darkness. That is the kind of life that many of you are contented to live as Christian people.

But is there any necessity for such alternations? Some degree of fluctuation there will always be. The very exercise of emotion tends to its extinction. Varying conditions of health and other externals will affect the buoyancy and clear-sightedness and vivacity of the spiritual life. Only a barometer that is out of order will always stand at set fair. The vane which never points but to south is rusty and means nothing.

But while there cannot be absolute uniformity, there might and should be a far nearer approach to an equable temperature of a much higher range than the readings of most professing Christians give. There is, indeed, a dismally uniform arctic temperature in many of them. Their hearts are fixed, truly, but fixed on earth. Their frost is broken by no thaw, their tepid formalism interrupted by no disturbing enthusiasm. We do not now speak of these, but of those who have moments of illumination, of communion, of submission of will, which fade all too soon. To such we would earnestly say that these moments may be prolonged and made more continuous. We need not be at the mercy of our own unregulated feelings. We can control our hearts, and keep them fixed, even if they should wish to wander. If we would possess the blessing of an approximately uniform religious life, we must assert the control of ourselves and use both bridle and spur. A great many religious people seem to think that good times come and go, and that they can do nothing to bring or keep or banish them. But that is not so. If the fire is burning low, there is such a thing on the hearth as a poker, and coals are at hand. If we feel our faith falling asleep, are we powerless to rouse it? Cannot we say I will trust? Let us learn that the variations in our religious emotions are largely subject to our own control, and may, if we will govern ourselves, be brought far nearer to uniformity than they ordinarily are.

Besides the fluctuations due to our own changes of mood, there are also the distracting influences of even the duties which God lays upon us. It is hard for a man with the material task of the moment that takes all his powers, to keep a little corner of his heart clear, and to feel that God is there. It is difficult in the clatter of the mill or in the crowds on Change, to do our work as for and in remembrance of Christ. It is difficult; but it is possible. Distractions are made distractions by our own folly and weakness. There is nothing that it is our duty to do which an honest attempt to do from the right motive could not convert into a positive help to getting nearer God. It is for us to determine whether the tasks of life, and this intrusive external and material world, shall veil Him from us, or shall reveal Him to us. It is for us to determine whether we shall make our secular avocation and its trials, little and great, a means to get nearer to God, or a means to shut Him out from us, and us from Him. There is nothing but sin incompatible with the fixed heart, the resolved will, the continual communion, nothing incompatible though there may be much that makes it difficult to realise and preserve these.

And then, of course, the trials and sorrows which strike us all make this fixed heart hard to keep. It is easy, as I said, to vow, I will sing and give praise, when flesh is comfortable and prosperity is spreading its bright sky over our heads. It is harder to say it when disappointment and bitterness are in the heart, and an empty place there that aches and will never be filled. It is harder for a man to say it when, like this Psalmist, his soul is amongst lions and he lies amongst them that are set on fire. But still, rightly taken, sorrow is the best ladder to God; and there is no such praise as comes from the lips that, if they did not praise, must sob, and that praise because they are beginning to learn that evil, as the world calls it, is the stepping-stone to the highest good. My heart is fixed. I will sing and give praise may be the voice of the mourner as well as of the prosperous and happy.

**III. Lastly, let me say just a word as to the means by which such a uniform character may be impressed upon our religious experience.**

There is another psalm where this same phrase is employed with a very important and illuminating addition, in which we read, His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. That is the secret of a fixed heart--continuous faith rooted and grounded in Him. This fluttering, changeful, unreliable, emotional nature of mine will be made calm and steadfast by faith, and duties done in the faith of God will bind me to Him; and sorrows borne and joys accepted in the faith of God will be links in the chain that knits Him to me.

But then the question comes, how to get this continuous faith? Brethren! I know no answer except the simple one, by continually making efforts after it, and adopting the means which Christ enjoins to secure it. A man climbing a hill, though he has to look to his feet when in the slippery places, and all his energies are expended in hoisting himself upwards by every projection and crag, will do all the better if he lifts his eye often to the summit that gleams above him. So we, in our upward course, shall make the best progress when we consciously and honestly try to look beyond the things seen and temporal, even whilst we are working in the midst of them, and to keep clear before us the summit to which our faith tends. If we lived in the endeavour to realise that great white throne, and Him that sits upon it, we should find it easier to say, My heart is fixed, O God! my heart is fixed.

But be sure of this, there will be no such uniformity of religious experience throughout our lives unless there be frequent times in them in which we go into our chambers and shut our doors about us, and hold communion with our Father in secret. Everything noble and great in the Christian life is fed by solitude, and everything poor and mean and hypocritical and low-toned is nourished by continual absence from the secret place of the Most High. There must be moments of solitary communion, if there are to be hours of strenuous service and a life of continual consecration.

We need not ask ourselves the question whether the realisation of the ideal of this fixedness in its perfect completeness is possible for us here on earth or not. You and I are a long way on this side of that realisation yet, and we need not trouble ourselves about the final stages until we have got on a stage or two more.

What would you think of a boy if, when he had just been taught to draw with a pencil, he said to his master, Do you think I shall ever be able to draw as well as Raphael? His teacher would say to him, Whether you will or not, you will be able to draw a good deal better than now, if you try. We need not trouble ourselves with the questions that disturb some people until we are very much nearer to perfection than any of us yet are. At any rate, we can approach indefinitely to that ideal, and whether it is possible for us in this life ever to have hearts so continuously fixed as that no attraction shall draw the needle aside one point from the pole or not, it is possible for us all to have them a great deal steadier than in that wavering, fluctuating vacillation which now rules them.

So let us pray the prayer, Unite my heart to fear Thy name, make the resolve, My heart is fixed, and listen obediently to the command, He exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord.