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

**PSALMS-045**. **SILENCE TO GOD by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1.* *Truly my soul waiteth upon God... . 5. My soul, wait thou only upon God."*

*Psalm 62:1, 5*

We have here two corresponding clauses, each beginning a section of the psalm. They resemble each other even more closely than appears from the English version, for the truly of the first, and the only of the second clause, are the same word; and in each case it stands in the same place, namely, at the beginning. So, word for word, the two answer to each other. The difference is, that the one expresses the Psalmist's patient stillness of submission, and the other is his self-encouragement to that very attitude and disposition which he has just professed to be his. In the one he speaks of, in the other to, his soul. He stirs himself up to renew and continue the faith and resignation which he has, and so he sets before us both the temper which we should have, and the effort which we should make to prolong and deepen it, if it be ours. Let us look at these two points then--the expression of waiting, and the self-exhortation to waiting.

Truly my soul waiteth upon God. It is difficult to say whether the opening word is better rendered truly, as here, or only, as in the other clause. Either meaning is allowable and appropriate. If, with our version, we adopt the former, we may compare with this text the opening of another psalm (lxxiii.), Truly God is good to Israel, and there, as here, we may see in that vehement affirmation a trace of the struggle through which it had been won. The Psalmist bursts into song with a word, which tells us plainly enough how much had to be quieted in him before he came to that quiet waiting, just as in the other psalm he pours out first the glad, firm certainty which he had reached, and then recounts the weary seas of doubt and bewilderment through which he had waded to reach it. That one word is the record of conflict and the trophy of victory, the sign of the blessed effect of effort and struggle in a truth more firmly held, and in a submission more perfectly practised. It is as if he had said, Yes! in spite of all its waywardness and fears, and self-willed struggles, my soul waits upon God. I have overcome these, and now there is peace within.

It is to be further observed that literally the words run, My soul is silence unto God. That forcible form of expression describes the completeness of the Psalmist's unmurmuring submission and quiet faith. His whole being is one great stillness, broken by no clamorous passions, by no loud-voiced desires, by no remonstrating reluctance. There is a similar phrase in another psalm (cix. 4), which may help to illustrate this: For my love they are my adversaries, but I am prayer--his soul is all one supplication. The enemies wrath awakens no flush of passion on his cheek, or ripple of vengeance in his heart. He meets it all with prayer. Wrapped in devotion and heedless of their rage, he is like Stephen, when he kneeled down among his yelling murderers, and cried with a loud voice, Lord! lay not this sin to their charge. So here we have the strongest expression of the perfect consent of the whole inward nature in submission and quietness of confidence before God.

That silence is first a silence of the will. The plain meaning of this phrase is resignation; and resignation is just a silent will. Before the throne of the Great King, His servants are to stand like those long rows of attendants we see on the walls of Eastern temples, silent, with folded arms, straining their ears to hear, and bracing their muscles to execute his whispered commands, or even his gesture and his glance. A man's will should be an echo, not a voice; the echo of God, not the voice of self. It should be silent, as some sweet instrument is silent till the owner's hand touches the keys. Like the boy-prophet in the hush of the sanctuary, below the quivering light of the dying lamps, we should wait till the awful voice calls, and then answer, Speak, Lord! for Thy servant heareth. Do not let the loud utterances of your own wills anticipate, nor drown, the still, small voice in which God speaks. Bridle impatience till He does. If you cannot hear His whisper, wait till you do. Take care of running before you are sent. Keep your wills in equipoise till God's hand gives the impulse and direction.

Such a silent will is a strong will. It is no feeble passiveness, no dead indifference, no impossible abnegation that God requires, when He requires us to put our wills in accord with His. They are not slain, but vivified, by such surrender; and the true secret of strength lies in submission. The secret of blessedness is there, too, for our sorrows come because there is discord between our circumstances and our wills, and the measure in which these are in harmony with God is the measure in which we shall feel that all things are blessings to be received with thanksgiving. But if we will take our own way, and let our own wills speak before God speaks, or otherwise than God speaks, nothing can come of that but what always has come of it--blunders, sins, misery, and manifold ruin.

We must keep our hearts silent too. The sweet voices of pleading affections, the loud cry of desires and instincts that roar for their food like beasts of prey, the querulous complaints of disappointed hopes, the groans and sobs of black-robed sorrows, the loud hubbub and Babel, like the noise of a great city, that every man carries within, must be stifled and coerced into silence. We have to take the animal in us by the throat, and sternly say, Lie down there and be quiet. We have to silence tastes and inclinations. We have to stop our ears to the noises around, however sweet the songs, and to close many an avenue through which the world's music might steal in. He cannot say, My soul is silent unto God, whose whole being is buzzing with vanities and noisy with the din of the market-place. Unless we have something, at least, of that great stillness, our hearts will have no peace, and our religion no reality.

There must be the silence of the mind, as well as of the heart and will. We must not have our thoughts ever occupied with other things, but must cultivate the habit of detaching them from earth, and keeping our minds still before God, that He may pour His light into them. Surely if ever any generation needed the preaching--Be still and let God speak--we need it. Even religious men are so busy with spreading or defending Christianity, that they have little time, and many of them less inclination, for quiet meditation and still communion with God. Newspapers, and books, and practical philanthropy, and Christian effort, and business, and amusement, so crowd into our lives now, that it needs some resolution and some planning to get a clear space where we can be quiet, and look at God.

But the old law for a noble and devout life is not altered by reason of any new circumstances. It still remains true that a mind silently waiting before God is the condition without which such a life is impossible. As the flowers follow the sun, and silently hold up their petals to be tinted and enlarged by his shining, so must we, if we would know the joy of God, hold our souls, wills, hearts, and minds still before Him, whose voice commands, whose love warms, whose truth makes fair, our whole being. God speaks for the most part in such silence only. If the soul be full of tumult and jangling noises, His voice is little likely to be heard. As in some kinds of deafness, a perpetual noise in the head prevents hearing any other sounds, the rush of our own fevered blood, and the throbbing of our own nerves, hinder our catching His tones. It is the calm lake which mirrors the sun, the least catspaw wrinkling the surface wipes out all the reflected glories of the heavens. If we would mirror God our souls must be calm. If we would hear God our souls must be silence.

Alas, how far from this is our daily life! Who among us dare to take these words as the expression of our own experience? Is not the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt, a truer emblem of our restless, labouring souls than the calm lake? Put your own selves by the side of this Psalmist, and honestly measure the contrast. It is like the difference between some crowded market-place all full of noisy traffickers, ringing with shouts, blazing in sunshine, and the interior of the quiet cathedral that looks down on it all, where are coolness and subdued light, and silence and solitude. Come, My people! enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee. Commune with your own heart and be still. In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.

This man's profession of utter resignation is perhaps too high for us; but we can make his self-exhortation our own. My soul! wait thou only upon God. Perfect as he ventures to declare his silence towards God, he yet feels that he has to stir himself up to the effort which is needed to preserve it in its purity. Just because he can say, My soul waits, therefore he bids his soul wait.

I need not dwell upon that self-stimulating as involving the great mystery of our personality, whereby a man exalts himself above himself, and controls, and guides, and speaks to his soul. But a few words may be given to that thought illustrated here, of the necessity for conscious effort and self-encouragement, in order to the preservation of the highest religious emotion.

We are sometimes apt to forget that no holy thoughts or feelings are in their own nature permanent, and the illusion that they are so, often tends to accelerate their fading. It is no wonder if we in our selectest hours of high communion with the living God should feel as if that lofty experience would last by virtue of its own sweetness, and need no effort of ours to retain it. But it is not so. All emotion tends to exhaustion, as surely as a pendulum to rest, or as an Eastern torrent to dry up. All our flames burn to their extinction. There is but one fire that blazes and is not consumed. Action is the destruction of tissue. Life reaches its term in death. Joy and sorrow, and hope and fear, cannot be continuous. They must needs wear themselves out and fade into a grey uniformity like mountain summits when the sun has left them.

Our religious experience too will have its tides, and even those high and pure emotions and dispositions that bind us to God can only be preserved by continual effort. Their existence is no guarantee of their permanence, rather is it a guarantee of their transitoriness, unless we earnestly stir up ourselves to their renewal. Like the emotions kindled by lower objects, they perish while they glow, and there must be a continual recurrence to the one Source of light and heat if the brilliancy is to be preserved.

Nor is it only from within that their continuance is menaced. Outward forces are sure to tell upon them The constant wash of the sea of life undermines the cliffs and wastes the coasts. The tear and wear of external occupations is ever acting upon our religious life. Travellers tell us that the constant friction of the sand on Egyptian hieroglyphs removes every trace of colour, and even effaces the deep-cut characters from basalt rocks. So the unceasing attrition of multitudinous trifles will take all the bloom off your religion, and efface the name of the King cut on the tables of your hearts, if you do not counteract them by constant earnest effort. Our devotion, our faith, our love are only preserved by being constantly renewed.

That vigorous effort is expressed here by the very form of the phrase. The same word which began the first clause begins the second also. As in the former it represented for us, with an emphatic Truly, the struggle through which the Psalmist had reached the height of his blessed experience, so here it represents in like manner the earnestness of the self-exhortation which he addresses to himself. He calls forth all his powers to the conflict, which is needed even by the man who has attained to that height of communion, if he would remain where he has climbed. And for us, brethren! who shrink from taking these former words upon our lips, how much greater the need to use our most strenuous efforts to quiet our souls. If the summit reached can only be held by earnest endeavour, how much more is needed to struggle up to it from the valleys below!

The silence of the soul before God is no mere passiveness. It requires the intensest energy of all our being to keep all our being still and waiting upon Him. So put all your strength into the task, and be sure that your soul is never so intensely alive as when in deepest abnegation it waits hushed before God.

Trust no past emotions. Do not wonder if they should fade even when they are brightest. Do not let their evanescence tempt you to doubt their reality. But always when our hearts are fullest of His love, and our spirits stilled with the sweetest sense of His solemn presence, stir yourselves up to keep firm hold of the else passing gleam, and in your consciousness let these two words live in perpetual alternation: Truly my soul waiteth upon God. My soul! wait thou only upon God.