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

**PSALMS-054**. **BLESSED TRUST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"O Lord of Hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee."*

*Psalm 84:12*

In my last sermon from the central portion of this psalm I pointed out that the Psalmist thrice celebrates the blessedness of certain types of character, and that these threefold benedictions constitute, as it were, the keynotes of the portions of the psalm in which they respectively occur. They are these: Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house; Blessed is the man in whose heart are the ways; and this final one, Blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee.

Now, this last benediction includes, as I then remarked, both of the others; both the blessedness belonging to dwelling in, and that realised by journeying towards, the House of the Lord. For trust is both fruition and longing; both aspiration and possession. But it not only includes the other two: it explains and surpasses them. For they bear, deeply stamped upon them, the impression of the imperfect stage of revelation to which the psalm belongs, and are tied to form in a manner which we ought not to be. But here the Psalmist gets behind all the externals of ceremonial worship, and goes straight to the heart of spiritual religion when, for dwelling in, and journeying towards, any house of the Lord, he substitutes that plain expression, the man that trusteth in Thee.

Now, the other two benedictions of which I have spoken do respectively form the centre of the first and second portions of this psalm; in each case the remainder of the section being an explanation of that central utterance. And here the case is the same; for the verses which precede this final exclamation are various phases of the experience of a man who trusts in God, and are the ground upon which his faith is pronounced blessed.

So I desire now to view these three preceding verses together, as being illustrations of the various blessednesses of the life of trust in God. They are not exhaustive. There are other tints and flashes of glory sleeping in the jewel which need the rays of light to impinge upon it at other angles, in order to wake them into scintillation and lustre. But there is enough in the context to warrant the Psalmist's outburst into this final rapturous exclamation, and ought to be enough to make us seek to possess that life as our own.

**I. First, then, note here how the heart of religion always has been, and is, trust in God.**

This Psalmist, nourished amidst the externalisms of an elaborate ceremonial, and compelled, by the stage of revelation at which he stood, to localise worship in an external Temple, in a fashion that we need not do, had yet attained to the conviction that, in the desert or in the Temple, God was near; that no weary pilgrimage was needed to reach His house, but that with one movement of a trusting heart the man clasped God wherever he was. And that is the living centre of all religion. I do not mean merely that our way to be sure of God is not through the understanding only, but through the outgoing of confidence in Him--but I mean that the kernel of a devout life is trust in God. The bond that underlies all the blessedness of human society, the thing that makes the sweetness of the sweetest ties that can knit men together, the secret of all the happy loves of husband and wife, friend and friend, parent and child, is simple confidence. And the more utter the confidence the more tranquilly blessed is the union and the life that flow from it. Transfer this, then--which is the bond of perfectness between man and man--to our relation to God, and you get to the very heart of the mystery. Not by externalisms of any kind, not by the clear dry light of the understanding, but by the outgoing of the heart's confidence to God, do we come within the clasp of His arms and become recipients of His grace. Trust knits to the unseen, and trust alone.

That has always been the way. This Psalmist is no exception to the devout souls of his time. For though, as I have said, externalisms and ritualisms filled a place then, that it is an anachronism and a retrogression that they should be supposed to fill now, still beneath all these there lay this one ancient, permanent relation, the relation of trust. From the day in which the father of the faithful as he is significantly called Abraham, believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness, down all through the ages of that ancient Church, every man who laid a real hold upon God clasped Him by the outstretched hand of faith. So the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was fully warranted in claiming all these ancient heroes, sages, and saints, as having lived by faith, and as being the foremost files in the same army in which the Christians of his day marched. The prophets who cried, Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength, were saying the very same thing as the Apostles who preached Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. The contents of the faith were expanded; the faith itself was identical. Like some of those old Roman roads, where to-day the wains of commerce and the chariots of ease and the toiling pedestrians pass over the lava blocks that have been worn by the tramp of legions and rutted by the wheels of their chariots, the way to God that we travel is the way on which all the saints from the beginning of time have passed in their pilgrimage. Trust is, always has been, always will be, the bond that knits men with God.

And trust is blessed, because the very attitude of confident dependence takes the strain off a man. To feel that I am leaning hard upon a firm prop, to devolve responsibility, to put the reins into another's hand, to give the helm into another steersman's grasp, whilst I may lie down and rest, that is blessedness, though there be a storm. In the story of frontier warfare we read how, day by day, the battalion that had been in the post of danger, and therefore of honour, was withdrawn into the centre; and another one was placed in the position that it had occupied. So, when we trust we put Him in the front, and we march more quietly, more blessedly, when we are in the centre, and He has to bear the brunt of the assailing foe.

Christian people! have you got as far past the outsides of religion as this Psalmist had? Do you recognise as clearly as he did that all this outward worship, and a great deal of our theology, is but the scaffolding; and that the real building lies inside of that; and that it is of value only as being a means to an end? Church membership is all very well; coming to church and chapel is all right; the outsides of worship will be necessary as long as our souls have outsides--their bodies. But you do not get into the house of the Lord unless you go in through the door of faith, which is opened to us all. The heart of the religious life, which makes it blessed, is trust in God.

**II. And now, secondly, a life of faith is a blessed life, because it talks with God.**

I have already said that my text is expanded in the preceding verses. And I now turn to them to catch the various flashes of the diversely coloured blessedness of this life. The first of them is that which I have just mentioned. The Psalmist has described for us the happy pilgrims passing from strength to strength, and in imagination has landed them in the Temple. And then he goes on to tell us what they did and found there.

The first thing that they did was to speak to Him who was in the Temple. Behold! O God our Shield! and look upon the face of Thine anointed. They had, as he has just said, Every one of them appeared before God in Zion. As they looked up to Him they asked Him to look down upon them. Behold! O God our Shield! Shield here is the designation of God Himself, and is an exclamation addressed to Him--Thou who art our God and Shield, look down upon us! And then comes a singular clause, about which much might be said if time permitted: Look upon the face of Thine anointed. The use of that word anointed seems to suggest that the psalm is either the outpouring of a king, or that it is spoken by some one in the train of a king, who feels that the favour bestowed upon the king will be participated in by his followers. But whilst that, if it be the explanation, might carry with it a hint as to the great truth of the mediation of Jesus Christ, our true King, I pass that by altogether, and fix upon the thought that here one element of the blessedness of the life of faith lies in the desire that God should look upon us. For that look means love, and that look secures protection and wise distribution of gifts. And it is life to have His eye fixed upon me, and to be conscious that He is looking at me. Dear brethren! if we want a lustre to be diffused through all our days, depend upon it, the surest and the only way to secure it is that that Face shall be felt to be turned toward us, as the sun shineth in his strength; and then all the landscape will rejoice, and the birds will sing and the waters will flash. Look upon me, and let me sun myself beneath Thine eye--to have that desire is blessed; and to feel that the desire is accomplished is more blessed still.

Dear friends! it seems to me that the ordinary Christian life of this day is terribly wanting in this experience of frank, free talk with God, and that that is one reason why so many of us professing Christians know so little of the blessedness of the man that trusts in God. You have religion enough to keep you from doing certain gross acts of sin; you have religion enough to make you uncomfortable in neglected duty. You have religion enough to impel you to certain acts that you suppose to be obligatory upon you. But do you know anything about the elasticity and spring of spirit in getting near God, and pouring out all your hearts to Him? The life of faith is not blessed unless it is a life of frank speaking with God.

**III. The life of faith is blessed, because it has fixed its desires on the true good.**

The Psalmist goes on--A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand; I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. We all know how strangely elastic time is, and have sometimes been amazed when we remembered what an infinity of joy or sorrow we had lived through in one tick of the pendulum. When men are dreaming, they pass through a long series of events in a moment's space. When we are truly awake, we live long in a short time, for life is measured, not by the length of its moments, but by the depth of its experiences. And when some new truth is flashed upon us, or some new emotion has shaken us as with an earthquake, or when some new blessing has burst into our lives, then we know how one day with men may be as it is with God, in a deeper sense, as a thousand years, so great is the change that it works upon us. There is nothing that will so fill life to the utmost bounds of its elastic capacity as strong trust in Him. There is nothing that will make our lives so blessed. This Psalmist, speaking with the voice of all them that trust in the Lord, here declares his clear consciousness that the true good for the human soul is fellowship with God.

But the clearest knowledge of that fact is not enough to bring the blessedness. There must be the next step--I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness--the definite resolve that I, for my part, will act according to my conviction, and believing that the best thing in life is to have God in life, and that that will make life, as it were, an eternity of blessedness even while it is made up of fleeting days, will put my foot down and make my choice, and having made it, will stick to it. It is all very well to say that A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand: have I chosen to dwell in the courts; and do I, not only in estimate but in feeling and practice, set communion with God high above everything besides?

This psalm, according to the superscription attached to it, is one for the sons of Korah. These sons of Korah were a branch of the Levitical priesthood, to whose charge was committed the keeping of the gates of the Temple, and hence this phrase is especially appropriate on their lips. But passing that, let me just ask you to lay to heart, dear friends! this one plain thought, that the effect of a real life of faith will be to make us perfectly sure that the true good is in God, and fixedly determined to pursue that. And you have no right to claim the name of a believing Christian, unless your faith has purged your eyes, so that you can see the hollowness of all besides, and has stiffened your will so that you can determine that, for your part, the Lord is the Strength of your heart, and your Portion for ever. The secret of blessedness lies here. Seek ye the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you.

**IV. Lastly, a life of faith is a life of blessedness, because it draws from God all necessary good.**

I must not dwell, as I had hoped to do, upon the last words preceding my text, The Lord God is a Sun and Shield--brightness and defence--the Lord will give grace and glory: grace, the loving gifts which will make a man gracious and graceful; glory, not any future lustre of the transfigured soul and glorified body, but the glory which belongs to the life of faith here on earth. Link that thought with the preceding one. The Lord is a Sun ... the Lord will give glory; like a little bit of broken glass lying in the furrows of a ploughed field, when the sun smites down upon it, it flashes, outshining many a diamond. If a man is walking upon a road with the sun behind him, his face is dark. He wheels himself round, and it is suffused with light, as Moses face shone. We all, with unveiled faces beholding, are changed from glory to glory. If we walk in the sunshine we shall shine too. If we walk in the light we shall be light in the Lord.

No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. Trust is inward, and the outside of trust is an upright walk; and if a man has these two, which, inasmuch as one is the root and the other is the fruit, are but one in reality, nothing that is good will be withheld from Him. For how can the sun but pour its rays upon everything that lives? Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights. So the life is blessed that talks with God; that has fixed its desires on Him as its Supreme Good; that is irradiated by His light, glorified by the reflection of His brightness, and ministered to with all necessary appliances by His loving self-communication.

We come back to the old word, dear friends! Trust in the Lord, and do good, and verily thou shalt be fed. We come back to the old message that nothing knits a man to God but faith with its child, righteousness. If trusting we love, and loving we obey, then in converse with Him, in fixed desires after Him, in daily and hourly reception from Him of Himself and His gifts, the life of earth will be full of a blessedness more real, more deep, more satisfying, more permanent, than can be found anywhere besides.

Who was it that said, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh to the Father but by Me? Tread that path, and you will come into the house of the Lord, and will dwell there all the days of your life. Believe in God, believe also in Me.