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

**PSALMS-061**. **THE ANSWER TO TRUST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known My name."*

*Psalm 91:14*

There are two voices speaking in the earlier part of this psalm: one that of a saint who professes his reliance upon the Lord, his Fortress; and another which answers the former speaker, and declares that he shall be preserved by God. In this verse, which is the first of the final portion of the psalm, we have a third voice--the voice of God Himself, which comes in to seal and confirm, to heighten and transcend, all the promises that have been made in His name. The first voice said of himself, I will trust; the second voice addresses that speaker, and says, Thou shalt not be afraid; the third voice speaks of him, and not to him, and says, Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him.

Why does this divine voice speak thus indirectly of this blessing of His servant? I think partly because it heightens the majesty of the utterance, as if God spake to the whole universe about what He meant to do for His friend who trusts Him; and partly because, in that general form of speech, there is really couched an whosoever; and it applies to us all. If God had said, Because thou hast set thy love upon Me, I will deliver thee, it had not been so easy for us to put ourselves in the place of the man concerning whom this great divine voice spoke; but when He says, Because he hath set his love upon Me, in the he there lies everybody; and the promise spoken before the universe as to His servants is spoken universally to His servants.

So, then, these words seem to me to carry two thoughts: the first, what God delights to find in a man; and the second, what God delights to give to the man in whom He finds it.

**I. Note, first, what God delights to find in man.**

There is, if we may reverently say so, a tone of satisfaction in the words, Because he hath set his love upon Me, and because he hath known My name. Thus, then, there are two things that the great Father's heart seeks, and wheresoever it finds them, in however imperfect a degree, He is glad, and lavishes upon such a one the most precious things in His possession.

What are these two things? Let us look at each of them. Now the word rendered set his love includes more than is suggested by that rendering, beautiful as it is. It implies the binding or knitting oneself to anything. Now, though love be the true cement by which men are bound to God, as it is the only real bond which binds men to one another, yet the word itself covers a somewhat wider area than is covered by the notion of love. It is not my love only that I am to fasten upon God, but my whole self that I am to bind to Him. God delights in us when we cling to Him. There is a threefold kind of clinging, which I would urge upon you and upon myself.

Let us cling to Him in our thoughts, hour by hour, moment by moment, amidst all the distractions of daily life. Whilst there are other things that must legitimately occupy our minds, let us see to it that, ever and anon, we turn ourselves away from these, and betake ourselves, with a conscious gathering in of our souls, to Him, and calm and occupy our hearts and minds with the bright and peaceful thoughts of a present God ever near us, and ever gracious to us. Life is but a dreary stretch of wilderness, unless all through it there be dotted, like a chain of ponds in a desert, these moments in which the mind fixes itself upon God, and loses sorrows and sins and weakness and all other sadnesses in the calm and blessed contemplation of His sweetness and sufficiency. The very heavens are bare and lacking in highest beauty, unless there stretch across them the long lines of rosy-tinted clouds. And so across our skies let us cast a continuous chain of thoughts of God, and as we go about our daily work, let us try to have our minds ever recurring to Him, like the linked pools that mirror heaven in the midst of the barren desert, and bring a reflection of life into the midst of its death. Cleave and cling to God, brother! by frequent thoughts of Him, diffused throughout the whole continuity of the busy day.

Then again, we might say, let us cleave to Him by our love, which is the one bond of union, as I said, between man and God, as it is the one bond of union between man and man. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, was from the beginning the Alpha, and until the end will be the Omega, of all true religion; and within the sphere of that commandment lie all duty, all Christianity, all blessedness, and all life. The heart that is divided is wretched; the heart that is consecrated is at rest. The love that is partial is nought; the love that is worth calling so is total and continuous. Let us cling to Him with our thoughts; let us cling to Him with the tendrils of our hearts.

Let us cleave to Him, still further, by the obedient contact of our wills with His, taking no commandments from men, and no overpowering impressions from circumstances, and no orders from our own fancies and inclinations and tastes and lusts, but receiving all our instructions from our Father in heaven. There is no real contact between us and God, no real cleaving to Him, howsoever the thought of God may be in our minds, and some kind of imperfect love to Him may be supposed to be in our hearts, unless there be the absolute submission of our wills to His authority; and only in the measure in which we are able to say, What He commands I do, and what He sends I accept, and my will is in His hands to be moulded, do we really get close and keep close to our Father in the heavens. He that hath brought himself into loving touch with God, and clings to Him in that threefold fashion, by thought, love, and submission, he, and only he, is so joined to the Lord as to be one Spirit.

Now that is not a state to be won and kept without much vigorous, conscious effort. The nuts in a machine work loose; the knots in a rope come untied, as the children say. The hand that clasps anything, by slow and imperceptible degrees, loses muscular contraction, and the grip of the fingers becomes slacker. Our minds and affections and wills have that same tendency to slacken their hold of what they grasp. Unless we tighten up the machine it will work loose; and unless we make conscious efforts to keep ourselves in touch with God, His hand will slip out of ours before we know that it is gone, and we shall fancy that we feel the impression of the fingers long after they have been taken away from our negligent palms.

Besides our own vagrancies, and the waywardness and wanderings of our poor, unreliable natures, there come in, of course, as hindrances, all the interruptions and distractions of outside things, which work in the same direction of loosening our hold on God. If the shipwrecked sailor is not to be washed off the raft he must tie himself on to it, and must see that the lashings are reliable and the knots tight; and if we do not mean to be drifted away from God without knowing it, we must make very sure work of anchor and cable, and of our own hold on both. Effort is needed, continuous and conscious, lest at any time we should slide away from Him. And this is what God delights to find: a mind and will that bind themselves to Him.

There is another thing in the text which, as I take it, is a consequence of that close union between man in his whole nature and God: I will set him on high because he hath known My name. Notice that the knowledge of the name comes after, and not before, the setting of the love or the fixing of the nature upon God. God's name is the same thing as His self-revelation or His manifested character. Then, does not every one to whom that revelation is made know His name? Certainly not. The word know is here used in the same deep sense in which it is employed all but uniformly in the New Testament--the same sense in which it is used in the writings of the Apostle John. It describes a knowledge which is a great deal more than a mere intellectual acquaintance with the facts of divine revelation. Or, to put the thought into other words, this is a knowledge which comes after we have set our love upon God, a knowledge which is the child of love. We forget sometimes that it is a Person, and not a system of truth, whom the Bible tells us we are to know. And how do you know people? Only by familiar acquaintance with them. You might read a description of a man, perfectly accurate, sufficiently full, but you would not therefore say you knew him. You might know about him, or fancy you did, but if you knew him, it would be because you had summered and wintered with him, and lived beside him, and were on terms of familiar acquaintance with him. As long as it is God and not theology, the knowledge of whom makes religion, so long it will not be the head, but the heart or spirit, that is the medium or organ by which we know Him. You have to become acquainted with Him and be very familiar with Him--that is to say, to fix your whole self upon Him--before you know Him; and it is only the knowledge which is born of love and familiarity that is worth calling knowledge at all. Just as with our earthly relationships and acquaintances, only they who love a man or a woman know such a one right down to the very depth of their being, so the one way to know God's name is to bind myself to Him with mind and heart and will, as friends cleave to one another. Then I shall know Him and be known of Him.

Still further, this knowledge which God delights to find in us men, is a knowledge which is experience. There is all the difference between reading about a foreign country and going to see it with your own eyes. The man that has been there knows it; the man that has not knows about it. And only he knows God to whom the commonplaces of religion have turned into facts which he verifies by his own experiences.

It is a knowledge, too, which influences life. Obviously the words of my text look back to what the saint was represented as saying in an earlier portion of the psalm. Why does God declare that the man has set his love upon Him, and knows His name? Because the saint professed this, I will say of the Lord, He is my Refuge and my Fortress. These are His name. The man knows it; he has it not only upon his lips, but in his heart, and feels that it is true, and acts accordingly. He is my Refuge and my Fortress; my God, in Him will I trust. The knowledge which God regards as knowledge of Him is one based upon experience and upon familiar acquaintance, and issuing in joyful recognition of my possession of Him as mine, and the outgoing of my confidence to Him. These are the things that God desires and delights to find in men.

**II. Note, secondly, what God gives to the man in whom He finds such things.**

I will deliver him; I will set him on high. These two clauses are substantially parallel, and yet there is a difference between them, as is the nature of the parallelism of Hebrew poetry, where the same ideas are repeated with a shade of modification, and the second of them somewhat surpassing the first. I will deliver him, says the promise. That confirms the view that the promise in the previous verse, There shall no plague come nigh thy dwelling, does not mean exemption from sorrow and trial because, if so, there would be no relevancy or blessedness in the promise of deliverance. He who needs deliverance is the man who is surrounded by evils, and God's promise is not that no evil shall come to the man who trusts Him, but that he shall be delivered out of the evil that does come, and that it will not be truly evil.

And why is he to be delivered? Because he has bound himself to Me, says God, therefore will I deliver him. Of course, if I am fastened to God, nothing that does not hurt Him can hurt me. If I am knit to Him as closely as this psalm contemplates, it is impossible but that out of His fulness my emptiness shall be filled, and with His rejoicing strength my weakness will be made strong. It is just the same idea as is given to us in the picture of Peter upon the water, when the cold waves are up to his knees, and the coward heart says, I am ready to sink, but yet, with the faith that comes with the fear, he puts out his hand and grasps Christ's hand, and as soon as he does, and the two are united, he is buoyant, and rises again, and the water is beneath the soles of his feet. He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters. Whoever is joined to God is lifted above all evil, and the evil that continues to eddy about him will change its character, and bear him onwards to his haven. For he who is thus knit to God in the living, pulsating bond of thought and affection and submission, will be delivered from sin.

When a boy first learns to skate, he needs some one to go behind him and hold him up whilst he uses his unaccustomed limbs; and so, when we are upon the smooth, treacherous ice of this wicked world, it is by leaning on God that we are kept upright. He hath set himself close to Me, I will deliver him, says God. Yea! he shall not fall, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Still further, we have another great promise, which is the explanation and extension of the former, I will set him on high, because he hath known My name. That is more than lifting a man up above the reach of the storms of life by means of any external deliverance. There is a better thing than that--namely, that our whole inward life be lived loftily. If it is true of us that we know His name, then our lives are hid with Christ in God, and far below our feet will be all the riot of earth and its noise and tumult and change. We shall live serene and uplifted lives on the mount, if we know His name and have bound ourselves to Him, and the troubles and cares and changes and duties and joys of this present will be away down below us, like the lowly cottages in some poor village, seen from the mountain top, the squalor out of sight, the magnitude diminished, the noise and tumult dimmed to a mere murmur that interrupts not the sacred silence of the lofty peak where we dwell with God. I will set him on high because he knows My name.

Then, perhaps, there is a hint in the words, as there is in subsequent words of the verse, of an elevation even higher than that, when, life ended and earth done, He shall receive into His glory those whom He hath guided by His counsel. I will set him on high, because he hath known My name, says the Jehovah of the Old Covenant. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, says the Jesus of the New, who is the Jehovah of the Old.