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

**PSALMS-069**. **REQUITING GOD by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"12. What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? 13. I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord."*

*Psalm 116:12-13*

There may possibly be a reference here to a part of the Passover ritual. It seems to have become the custom in later times to lift high the wine cup at that feast and drink it with solemn invocation and glad thanksgiving. So we find our Lord taking the cup--the cup of blessing as Paul calls it--and giving thanks. But as there is no record of the introduction of that addition to the original Paschal celebration, we do not know but that it was later than the date of this psalm. Nor is there any need to suppose such an allusion in order either to explain or to give picturesque force to the words. It is a most natural thing, as all languages show, to talk of a man's lot, either of sorrow or joy, as the cup which he has to drink; and there are numerous instances of the metaphor in the Psalms, such as Thou art the Portion of mine inheritance and of my cup, Thou maintainest my lot. My cup runneth over. That familiar emblem is all that is wanted here.

Then one other point in reference to the mere words of the text may be noticed. Salvation can scarcely be taken in its highest meaning here, both because the whole tone of the psalm fixes its reference to lower blessings, and because it is in the plural in the Hebrew. The cup of salvation expresses, by that plural form, the fulness and variety of the manifold and multiform deliverances which God had wrought and was working for the Psalmist. His whole lot in life appears to him as a cup full of tender goodness, loving faithfulness, delivering grace. It runs over with divine acts of help and sustenance. As his grateful heart thinks of all God's benefits to him, he feels at once the impulse to requite and the impossibility of doing so. With a kind of glad despair he asks the question that ever springs to thankful lips, and having nothing to give, recognises the only possible return to God to be the acceptance of the brimming chalice which His goodness commends to his thirst.

The great thought, then, which lies here is that we best requite God by thankfully taking what He gives.

**I. Now I note to begin with--how deep that thought goes into the heart of God.**

Why is it that we honour God most by taking, not by giving? The first answer that occurs to you, no doubt, is--because of His all-sufficiency and our emptiness. Man receives all. God needs nothing. We have all to say, after all our service, Of Thine own have we given Thee. No doubt that is quite true; and rightly understood that is a strengthening and a glad truth. But is that all which can be said in explanation of this principle? Surely not. If I were hungry I would not tell thee; for the world is mine and the fulness thereof, is a grand word, but it does not give all the truth. When Paul stood on Mars Hill, and, within sight of the fair images of the Parthenon, shattered the intellectual basis of idolatry, by proclaiming a God not worshipped with men's hands as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all men all things, that truth, mighty as it is, is not all. We requite God by taking rather than by giving, not merely because He needs nothing, and we have nothing which is not His. If that were all, it might be as true of an almighty tyrant, and might be so used as to forbid all worship before the gloomy presence, to give reverence and love to whom were as impertinent as the grossest offerings of savage idolaters. But the motive of His giving to us is the deepest reason why our best recompense to Him is our thankful reception of His mercies. The principle of our text reposes at last on God is love and wishes our hearts, and not merely on God has all and does not need our gifts.

Take the illustration from our own love and gifts. Do we not feel that all the beauty and bloom of a gift is gone if the giver hopes to receive as much again? Do we not feel that it is all gone if the receiver thinks of repaying it in any coin but that of the heart? Love gives because it delights in giving. It gives that it may express itself and may bless the recipient. If there be any thought of return it is only the return of love. And that is how God gives. As James puts it, He is the giving God,--who gives, not as our version inadequately renders, liberally, but simply--that is, I suppose, with a single eye, without any ulterior view to personal advantage, from the impulse of love alone, and having no end but our good. Therefore it is, because of that pure, perfect love, that He delights in no recompense, but only in the payment of a heart won to His love and melted by His mercies. Therefore it is that His hand is outstretched, hoping for nothing again. His Almighty all-sufficiency needs nought from us, and to all heathen notions of worship and tribute puts the question: Do ye requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? But His deep heart of love desires and delights in the echo of its own tones that is evoked among the rocky hardnesses of our hearts, and is glad when we take the full cup of His blessings and, as we raise it to our lips, call on the name of the Lord. Is not that a great and a gracious thought of our God and of His great purpose in His mercies?

But now let us look for a moment at the elements which make up this requital of God in which He delights. And, first I put a very simple and obvious one, let us be sure that we recognise the real contents of our cup. It is a cup of salvations, however hard it is sometimes to believe it. Of how much blessing and happiness we all rob ourselves by our slowness to feel that! Some of us by reason of natural temperament; some of us by reason of the pressure of anxieties, and the aching of sorrows, and the bleeding of wounds; some of us by reason of mere blindness to the true character of our present, have little joyous sense of the real brightness of our days. It seems as if joys must have passed and be seen in the transfiguring light of memory, before we can discern their fairness; and then, when their place is empty, we know that we were entertaining angels unawares. Many men and women live in the gloom of a lifelong regret for the loss of some gift which, when they had it, seemed nothing very extraordinary, and could not keep them from annoyance with trifles. Common sense and reasonable regard for our own happiness and religious duty unite, as they always do, in bidding us take care that we know our blessings. Do not let custom blind you to them. Do not let tears so fill your eyes that you cannot see the goodness of the Lord. Do not let thunderclouds, however heavy their lurid piles, shut out from you the blue that is in your sky. Do not let the empty cup be your first teacher of the blessings you had when it was full. Do not let a hard place here and there in the bed destroy your rest. Seek, as a plain duty, to cultivate a buoyant, joyous sense of the crowded kindnesses of God in your daily life. Take full account of all the pains, all the bitter ingredients, remembering that for us weak and sinful men the bitter is needful. If still the cup seem charged with distasteful draught, remember whose lip has touched its rim, leaving its sacred kiss there, and whose hand holds it out to you while He says, Do this in remembrance of Me. The cup which my Saviour giveth me, can it be anything but a cup of salvations?

**II. Then, again, another of the elements of this requital of God is--be sure that you take what God gives.**

There can be no greater slight and dishonour to a giver than to have his gifts neglected. You give something that has, perhaps, cost you much, or which at any rate has your heart in it, to your child, or other dear one; would it not wound you if a day or two after you found it tossing about among a heap of unregarded trifles? Suppose that some of those Rajahs who received presents on a royal visit to India had gone out from the durbar and flung them into the kennel, that would have been insult and disaffection, would it not? But these illustrations are trivial by the side of our treatment of the giving God. Surely of all the follies and crimes of our foolish and criminal race, there is none to match this--that we will not take and make our own the things that are freely given to us of God. This is the height of all madness; this is the lowest depth of all sin. He spares not His own Son, the Son spares not Himself, the Father gives up His Son for us all because He loves, the Son loves us, and gives Himself to us and for us, and we stand with our hands folded on our breasts, will not condescend so much as to stretch them out, or hold our blessings with so slack a grasp that at any time we may let them slip through our careless fingers. He prays us with much entreaty to receive the gift, and neglect and stolid indifference are His requital. Is there anything worse than that? Surely Scripture is right when it makes the sin of sins that unbelief, which is at bottom nothing else than a refusal to take the cup of salvation. Surely no sharper grief can be inflicted on the Spirit of God than when we leave His gifts neglected and unappropriated.

In the highest region of all, how many of these there are which we treat so! A Saviour and His pardoning blood; a Spirit and His quickening energies; that eternal life which might spring in our souls a fountain of living waters--all these are ours. Are we as strong as we might be if we used the strength which we have? How comes it that with the fulness of God at our sides we are empty; that with the word of God in our hands we know so little; that with the Spirit of God in our hearts we are so fleshly; that with the joy of our God for our portion we are so troubled; that with the heart of God for our hiding-place we are so defenceless? We have all and abound, and yet we are poor and needy, like some infatuated beggar, in rags and wretchedness, to whom wealth had been given which he would not use.

In the lower region of daily life and common mercies the same strange slowness to take what we have is found. There are very few men who really make the best of their circumstances. Most of us are far less happy than we might be, if we had learned the divine art of wringing the last drop of good out of everything. After our rude attempts at smelting there is a great deal of valuable metal left in the dross, which a wiser system would extract. One wonders when one gets a glimpse of how much of the raw material of happiness goes to waste in the manufacture in all our lives. There is so little to spare, and yet so much is flung away. It needs a great deal of practical wisdom, and a great deal of strong, manly Christian principle, to make the most of what God gives us. Watchfulness, self-restraint, the power of suppressing anxieties and taking no thought for the morrow, and most of all, the habitual temper of fellowship with God, which is the most potent agent in the chemistry that extracts its healing virtue from everything--all these are wanted. The lesson is worth learning, lest we should wound that most tender Love, and lest we should impoverish and hurt ourselves. Do not complain of your thirsty lips till you are sure that you have emptied the cup of salvation which God gives.

**III. One more element of this requital of God has still to be named, the thankful recognition of Him in all our feasting--call on the name of the Lord.**

Without this the preceding precept would be a piece of pure selfish Epicureanism--and without this it would be impossible. Only he who enjoys life in God enjoys it worthily. Only he who enjoys life in God enjoys it at all. This is the true infusion which gives sweetness to whatever of bitter, and more of sweetness to whatever of sweet, the cup may contain, when the name of the Lord is pronounced above it. The Jewish father at the Passover feast solemnly lifted the wine cup above his head, and drank with thanksgiving. The meal became a sacrament. So here the word rendered take might be translated raise, and we may be intended to have the picture as emblematical of our consecration to all our blessings by a like offering of them before God and a like invoking of the Giver.

Christ gave us not only the ritual of an ordinance, but the pattern for our lives, when He took the cup and gave thanks. So common joys become sacraments, enjoyment becomes worship, and the cup which holds the bitter or the sweet skilfully mingled for our lives becomes the cup of blessing and salvation drank in remembrance of Him. If we carried that spirit with us into all our small duties, sorrows, and gladnesses, how different they would all seem! We should then drink for strength, not for drunkenness. We should not then find that God's gifts hid Him from us. We should neither leave any of them unused nor so greedily grasp them that we let His hand go. Nothing would be too great for us to attempt, nothing too small for us to put our strength into. There would be no discord between earthly gladness and heavenly desires, nor any repugnance at what He held to our lips. We should drink of the cup of His benefits, and all would be sweet--until we drew nearer and slaked our thirst at the river of His pleasures and the Fountain-head itself.

One more word. There is an old legend of an enchanted cup filled with poison, and put treacherously into a king's hand. He signed the sign of the Cross and named the name of God over it, and it shivered in his grasp. Do you take that name of the Lord as a test. Name Him over many a cup of which you are eager to drink, and the glittering fragments will lie at your feet, and the poison be spilled on the ground. What you cannot lift before His pure eyes and think of Him while you enjoy is not for you. Friendships, schemes, plans, ambitions, amusements, speculations, studies, loves, businesses--can you call on the name of the Lord while you put these cups to your lips? If not, fling them behind you--for they are full of poison which, for all its sugared sweetness, at the last will bite like a serpent and sting like an adder.