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

**ZECHARIAH-004. THE RIGHT OF ENTRY by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by."*

*Zechariah 3:7*

A WORD or two of explanation will probably be necessary in order to see the full meaning of this great promise. The Prophet has just been describing a vision of judgment which he saw, in which the high priest, as representative of the nation, stood before the Angel of the Lord as an unclean person. He is cleansed and clothed, his foul raiment stripped off him, and a fair priestly garment, with Holiness to the Lord written on the front of it, put upon him. And then follow a series of promises, of which the climax is the one that I have read. I will give thee a place of access, says the Revised Version, instead of places to walk; I will give thee a place of access among those that stand by; the attendant angels are dimly seen surrounding their Lord. And so the promise of my text, in highly figurative fashion, is that of free and unrestrained approach to God, of a life that is like that of the angels that stand before His Face.

So, then, the words suggest to us, first, what a Christian life may be.

**I. There are two images blended together in the great words of my text; the one is that of a king's court, the other is that of a temple.**

With regard to the former it is a privilege given to the highest nobles of a kingdom--or it was so in old days--to have the right of entrée, at all moments and in all circumstances, to the monarch. With regard to the latter, the prerogative of the high priest, who was the recipient of this promise, as to access to the Temple, was a very restricted one. Once a year, with the blood that prevented his annihilation by the brightness of the Presence into which he ventured, he passed within the veil, and stood before that mysterious Light that coruscated in the darkness of the Holy of Holies. But this High Priest is promised an access on all days and at all times; and that He may stand there, beside and like the seraphim, who with one pair of wings veiled their faces in token of the incapacity of the creature to behold the Creator; with twain veiled their feet in token of the unworthiness of creatural activities to be set before Him, and with twain did fly in token of their willingness to serve Him with all their energies. This Priest passes within the veil when He will. Or, to put away the two metaphors, and to come to the reality far greater than either of them, we can, whensoever we please, pass into the presence before which the splendours of an earthly monarch's court shrink into vulgarity, and attain to a real reception of the light that irradiates the true Holy Place, before which that which shone in the earthly shrine dwindles and darkens into a shadow. We may live with God, and in Him, and wrap a veil and privacy of glorious light about us, whilst we pilgrim upon earth, and may have hidden lives which, notwithstanding all their surface occupation with the distractions and duties and enjoyments of the present, deep down in their centres are knit to God. Our lives may on the outside thus be largely amongst the things seen and temporal, and yet all the while may penetrate through these, and lay hold with their true roots on the eternal. If we have any religious life at all, the measure in which we possess it is the measure in which we may ever more dwell in the house of the Lord, and have our hearts in the secret place of the Most High, amid the stillnesses and the sanctities of His immediate dwelling.

Our Master is the great Example of this, of whom it is said, not only in reference to His mysterious and unique union of nature with the Father in His divinity, but in reference to the humanity which He had in common with us all, yet without sin, that the Son of Man came down from heaven, and even in the act of coming, and when He had come, was yet the Son of Man which is in heaven. Thus we, too, may have a place of access among them that stand by, and not need to envy the angels and the spirits of the just made perfect, the closeness of their communion, and the vividness of their vision, for the same, in its degree, may be ours. We, too, can turn all our desires into petitions, and of every wish make a prayer. We, too can refer all our needs to His infinite supply. We, too may consciously connect all our doings with His will and His glory; and for us it is possible that there shall be, as if borne on those electric wires that go striding across pathless deserts, and carry their messages through unpeopled solitudes, between Him and us a communication unbroken and continuous, which, by a greater wonder than even that of the telegraph, shall carry two messages, going opposite ways simultaneously, bearing to Him the swift aspirations and supplications of our spirits, and bringing to us the abundant answer of His grace. Such a conversation in heaven, and such association with the bands of the blessed is possible even for a life upon earth.

**II. Secondly, let us consider this promise as a pattern for us of what Christian life should be, and, alas! so seldom is.**

All privilege is duty, and everything that is possible for any Christian man to become, it is imperative on him to aim at. There is no greater sin than living beneath the possibilities of our lives, in any region, whether religious or other it matters not. Sin is not only going contrary to the known law of God, but also a falling beneath a divine ideal which is capable of realisation. And in regard to our Christian life, if God has flung open His temple-gates and said to us, Come in, My child, and dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and abide there under the shadow of the Almighty, finding protection and communion and companionship in My worship, there can be nothing more insulting to Him, and nothing more fatally indicative of the alienation of our hearts from Him, than that we should refuse to obey the merciful invitation.

What should we say of a subject who never presented himself in the court to which he had the right of free entry? His absence would be a mark of disloyalty, and would be taken as a warning-bell in preparation for his rebellion. What should we say of a son or a daughter, living in the same city with their parents, who never crossed the threshold of the father's house, but that they had lost the spirit of a child, and that if there was no desire to be near there could be no love?

So, if we will ask ourselves, How often do I use this possibility of communion with God, which might irradiate all my daily life? I think we shall need little else, in the nature of evidence, that our piety and our religious experience are terribly stunted and dwarfed, in comparison with what they ought to be.

There is an old saying, He that can tell how often he has thought of God in a day has thought of Him too seldom. I dare say many of us would have little difficulty in counting on the fingers of one hand, and perhaps not needing them all, the number of times in which, to-day, our thoughts have gone heavenwards. What we may be is what we ought to be, and not to use the prerogatives of our position is the worst of sins.

Again, my text suggests to us what every Christian life will hereafter perfectly be.

Some commentators take the words of my text to refer only to the communion of saints from the earth, with the glorified angels, in and after the Resurrection. That is a poor interpretation, for heaven is here to-day. But still there is a truth in the interpretation which we need not neglect. Only let us remember that nothing--so far as Scripture teaches us--begins yonder except the full reaping of the fruits of what has been sown here, and that if a man's feet have not learned the path into the Temple when he was here upon earth, death will not be the guide for him into the Father's presence. All that here has been imperfect, fragmentary, occasional, interrupted, and marred in our communion with God, shall one day be complete. And then, oh! then, who can tell what undreamed-of depths and sweetnesses of renewed communion and of intercourses begun, for the first time then, between those that stand by, and have stood there for ages, will then be realised?

Ye are come--even here on earth--to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the first-born, but for us all there may be the quiet hope that hereafter we shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever; and in solemn troops and sweet societies shall learn what fellowship, and brotherhood, and human love may be.

**III. Lastly, notice, not from my text but from its context, how any life may become thus privileged.**

The promise is preceded by a condition: If thou wilt walk in My ways, and if thou wilt keep My charge, then ... I will give thee access among those that stand by. That is to say, you cannot keep the consciousness of God's presence, nor have any blessedness of communion with Him, if you are living in disobedience of His commandments or in neglect of manifest duty. A thin film of vapour in our sky tonight will hide the moon. Though the vapour itself may be invisible, it will be efficacious as a veil. And any sin, great or small, fleecy and thin, will suffice to shut me out from God. If we are keeping His commandments, then, and only then, shall we have access with free hearts into His presence.

But to lay down that condition seems the same thing as slamming the door in every man's face. But let us remember what went before my text, the experience of the priest to whom it was spoken in the vision. His filthy garments were stripped off him, and the pure white robes worn on the great Day of Atonement, the sacerdotal dress, were put upon him. It is the cleansed man that has access among those that stand by. And if you ask how the cleansing is to be effected, take the great words of the Epistle to the Hebrews as an all-sufficient answer, coinciding with, but transcending, what this vision taught Zechariah: Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest of all, by the blood of Jesus, ... and having a High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience. Cleansed by Christ, and with Him for our Forerunner, we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him, who proclaims to the whole world, No man cometh to the Father but by Me.