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

**1 KINGS-006. THE KING BLESSING HIS PEOPLE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"54. And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the Lord, he arose from before the altar of the Lord, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven. 55. And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying, 56. Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest unto His people Israel, according to all that He promised: there hath not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised by the hand of Moses His servant. 57. The Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers: let Him not leave us, nor forsake us: 58. That He may incline our hearts unto Him, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, and His statutes, and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers. 59. And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the Lord, be nigh unto the Lord our God day and night, that He maintain the cause of His servant, and the cause of His people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require: 60. That all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else. 61. Let your heart therefore be perfect with the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes, and to keep His commandments, as at this day. 62. And the king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice before the Lord. 63. And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace-offerings, which he offered unto the Lord, two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the Lord."*

*1 Kings 8:54-63*

The great ceremonial of dedicating the Temple was threefold. The first stage was setting the ark in its place, which was the essence of the whole thing. God's presence was the true dedication, and that was manifested by the bright cloud that filled the sanctuary as soon as the ark was placed there. The second stage was the lofty and spiritual prayer, saturated with the language and tone of Deuteronomy, and breathing the purest conceptions of the character and nature of God, and all aglow with trust in Him. Then followed, thirdly, this Blessing of the Congregation. The prayer had been uttered by the kneeling king. Now he stands up, and, with ringing tones that reach to the outskirts of the crowd, he gathers the spirit of his prayer into two petitions, preceded by praise for national blessings, and followed by exhortation to national obedience. A huge sacrifice of unexampled magnitude closes the whole.

**I. Note the thankful retrospect of the nation's past (verse 56).**

Solomon blessed the congregation when, in their name, he lifted up his voice to bless the Lord, prayed that God would incline their hearts to keep His law, and would maintain their cause, and exhorted them to keep their hearts perfect with Him. We bless each other when we ask God to bless, and when we draw each other nearer Him. Standing there in the new Temple, with a united nation gathered before him, the cloud filling the house, and peace resting on all his land to its farthest border, the king looks back on the long road from Sinai and the desert, and sums up the whole history in one sentence. The end has vindicated the methods. There had been many a dark time when enemies had oppressed, and many a hard-fought field had been stained with Israel's blood; but all had tended to this calm hour, when Israel's multitudes were gathered in worship, and their unguarded homes were safe. There had been many heroes in the long line.

Time would fail him to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; of David and Samuel ... who ... turned to flight armies of aliens. One name alone is worthy to be named,--the name of the true Deliverer and Monarch. It is the Lord who hath given rest unto His people. We look on the past most wisely when we see in it all the working of one mighty Hand, and pass beyond the great names of history or the dear names which have made the light of our homes, to the ever-living God, who works through changing instruments; and the help that is done on earth, He doeth it Himself. We read the past most truly when we see in all its vicissitudes God's unchanging faithfulness, and recognise that the foes and sorrows which often pressed sore upon us were no breach of His faithful promises, but either His loving chastisement for our faithlessness, or His loving discipline meant to perfect our characters. We read the past best from the vantage-ground of the Temple. From its height we understand the lie of the land. Communion with God explains much which is else inexplicable. Solomon's judgment of Israel's checkered history will be our judgment of our own when we stand in the higher courts of the heavenly home, and look from that height upon all the way by which the Lord our God hath led us. In the meantime, it is often a trial for faith to repeat these words; but the blessing that comes from believing them true is worth the effort to stifle our tears in order to say them.

**II. Note the prayer for obedient hearts (verses 57, 58).**

The proper subject-matter of this petition is that He may incline our hearts to walk in His ways, and God's presence is invoked as a means thereto. The deepest desire of a truly religious soul is for the felt nearness of God. That goes before all other blessings, and contains them all. Nothing is so needful or so sweet as that The presence of God is the absence of evil, the evil both of pain and of sin, as surely as the rising sun is the routing of night's black hosts. The best of all is, God is with us. The prayer again looks back to the past, and asks that the ancient experiences may be renewed. The generations of those who trust in God are knit together, and the wonders of old time are capable of repetition to-day. Faith can say with deeper meaning than the Preacher, That which hath been is that which shall be. However varying may be the forms, the fact of a divine presence and help according to need is invariable, and they that have gone before have not exhausted the fountain, which will fill the vessel of the latest comer as it did that of the first. How beautifully the abiding God and the fleeting series of our fathers is contrasted! A moment of triumph, when some work, like that of building the Temple, which has for ages been looked forward to, and into which the sacrifices and aspirations of a long line of dead toilers are built, brings strongly before all thoughtful men the continuity of a nation or a Church, and the transiency of its individual members. It should suggest the abiding God yet more strongly than it does the passing fathers. The mercy remains the same, while the receivers change. The sunshine and the tree are the same, though the leaves which glisten and grow in the light have but one summer to live.

But Solomon desires that God may be with him and his people for one specific purpose. Is it to bring outward prosperity, or to extend their territory, or to give them victory? As in his choice in his dream, so now, he asks, not for these things, but for an inward influence on heart and will. What he wants most for himself and them is moral conformity to God's will. All must be right if that be right. The prayer implies that, without God's help, the heart will wander from the paths of duty. The weakness of human nature, and the consequent necessity for God's grace in order to obedience, were as deeply felt by the devout men of the Old Testament as by Apostles. They are felt by every man who has honestly tried to measure the sweep and inwardness of God's law, and to realise it in life. We need go but a very short way on the road to discover that temptations to diverge lie so thick on either side, and that our feet grow weary so soon, that we shall make but little progress without help from above.

The synonyms for the law are worthy of notice. Why are there so many of these in the Old Testament? For the same reason that there are so many for money in English,--because those who made the language thought so much about the thing, and delighted in it so much. As commandments, it was solemnly imposed by rightful authority, and obedience was obligatory. The word rendered statutes means something engraved, or written, and recalls the tables inscribed by God's finger. Judgments are the divine decisions or sentences as to what is right, and therefore the infallible clue to the else bewildering labyrinth. To obey these commandments, to read that solemn writing, and to accept these decisions as our guides, is man's perfection and blessedness; and for that God's felt presence is indispensable.

**III. Note the prayer for God's defence (verses 59, 60).**

The proper subject-matter of this petition is that God would maintain the cause of king and nation; and it is preceded by a petition that, to that end, the preceding prayer may be answered, and is followed by the desire that thereby the knowledge of God may fill the earth. The prayer for outward blessings comes after the prayer for inward heart-obedience. Is not that the right order? Our prayers need to be prayed for, and a true desire is not contented with one utterance. To ask that what we have asked may be given is no vain repetition, nor a sign of weak faith, or undue anxiety. How bold the figure in asking that the prayer may lie before God day and night, like some suppliant at the foot of His throne!

Note the grand aim of God's help of Israel,--the universal diffusion of His name among all the peoples of the earth. Solomon understood the divine vocation of Israel, and had risen above desiring blessings only for his own or his subjects sake. Later ages fell from that elevation of feeling, and hugged their special privileges without a thought of the obligations which they involved. God's choice of Israel was not meant for the exclusion of the Gentiles, but as the means of transmitting the knowledge of God to them. The one nation was chosen that God's grace might fructify through it to all. The fire was gathered into a hearth, that the whole house might be warmed. But selfishness marred the divine plan, and Israel became a nonconductor, and the privileges selfishly kept became corrupt; as the miser's corn stored in his barns in famine breeds weevils. Christians need no more solemn lesson of what comes from selfishly hoarding spiritual blessings than the fate of Israel. God hath shined into our hearts, that we may give to others who sit in the dark the light which we possess; and if we fail to do so, the light will darken within us.

**IV.** The blessing ends with one brief, all-comprehensive charge to the people, which seems based, by its therefore, on the preceding thought of Jehovah as the only God. The only attitude corresponding to His sole and supreme Majesty is the entire devotion of heart, which leads to thoroughgoing obedience to His commandments. The word rendered perfect literally means entire or sound, and here expresses the complete devotion of the whole nature. Solomon meant that it should be complete, in contradistinction to any sidelong glances to idolatry. The principle underlying that therefore is that, God being what He is, our only God and refuge, the only adequate hope and object of our nature, we should give our whole selves to Him. We, too, are tempted to bring Him divided hearts, and to carry some of our love and trust as offerings at other shrines. But if there be one God, and none other but He, then to serve Him with all our heart and strength and mind is the dictate of common sense, and the only service which He can accept, or which can bring to our else distracted natures peace and satisfaction. His voice to us is, My son, give Me thy whole heart. Our answer to Him should ever be that prayer, Lord, ... unite my heart to fear Thy name. A divided heart is misery. Partial trust is distrust. Love me all in all, or not at all, is the requirement of all deep, human love; and shall God ask less than men and women ask from and give to one another?