

# Ephesians 1 Maclaren

EPHESIANS 1  
SERMONS BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN

## SAINTS AND FAITHFUL by Alexander Maclaren

'The saints which are at Ephesus and the faithful in Christ Jesus.' - Ephesians 1:1.

THAT is Paul's way of describing a church. There were plenty of very imperfect Christians in the community at Ephesus and in the other Asiatic churches to which this letter went: As we know, there were heretics amongst them, and many others to whom the designation of 'holy' seemed inapplicable. But Paul classes them all under one category, and describes the whole body of believing people by these two words, which must always go together if either of them is truly applied, 'saints' and 'faithful.'

Now I think that from this simple designation we may gather two or three very obvious indeed, and very familiar and old-fashioned, but also very important, thoughts.

### I. A Christian is a saint.

We are accustomed to confine the word to persons who tower above their brethren in holiness and manifest godliness and devoutness. The New Testament never does anything like that. Some people fancy that nobody can be a saint unless he wears a special uniform of certain conventional sanctities. The New Testament does not take that point of view at all, but regards all true believers in Jesus Christ as being, therein and thereby, saints.

Now, what does it mean by that? The word at bottom simply signifies separation. Whatever is told off from a mass for a specific purpose would be called, if it were a thing, 'holy.' But there is one special kind of separation which makes a person a saint, and that is separation to God, for His uses, in obedience to His commandment, that He may employ the man as He will. So in the Old Testament the designation 'holy' was applied quite as much to the high priest's mitre or to the sacrificial vessels of the Temple as it was to the people who used them. It did not imply originally, and in the first place, moral qualities at all, but simply that this person or that thing belonged to God. But then you cannot belong to God unless you are like Him There can be no consecration to God except the heart is being purified. So the ordinary meaning of holiness, as moral purity and cleanness from sin, necessarily comes from the original meaning, separation and devotion to the service of God.

Thus we get the whole significance of Christian holiness. We are to belong to God, and to know that we do belong to Him. We are to be separated from the mass of people and things that have no consciousness of ownership and do not yield themselves up to Him for His use. But we cannot belong to Him, and be devoted to His service, unless we are being made day by day pure in heart, and like Him to whom we say that we belong. A human being can only be God's by the surrender of heart and will, and through the continual appropriation into his own character and life, of righteousness and purity like that which belongs to God. Holiness is God's stamp upon a man, His 'mark,' by which He says, - This man belongs to Me. As you write your name in a book, so God writes His name on His property, and the name that He writes is the likeness of His own character.

Note, again, that in God's church there is no aristocracy of sanctity, nor does the name of saint belong only to those who live high above the ordinary tumults of life and the secularities of daily duty. You may be as true a saint in a factory - ay! and a far truer one - than in a hermitage. You do not need to cultivate a mediaeval or Roman Catholic type of ascetic piety in order to be called saints. You do not need to be amongst the select few to whom it is given here upon earth, but not given without their own effort, to rise to the highest summits of holy conformity with the divine will. But down amongst all the troubles and difficulties and engrossing occupations of our secular work, you may be living saintly lives; for the one condition of being holy is that we should know whose we are and whom we serve, and we can carry the consciousness of belonging to Him into every corner of the poorest, most crowded, and most distracted life, recognising His presence and seeking to do His will The saint is the man who says, 'O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; Thou hast loosed my bonds.' Because He has loosed my bonds, the bonds that held me to my sins. He has therein fastened me with far more stringent bonds of love to the sweet and free service of His redeeming love. All His children are His saints.

The Old Testament ritual had one sacrifice which carried this truth in it. It is the first prescribed in the Book of Leviticus, the ceremonial book - namely, the burnt offering. Its especial meaning was this, that the whole man is to be laid upon God's altar and there consumed in the fire of a divine love. It began with expiation, as all sacrifices must, and on the footing of expiation there followed the transformation, by the fire of God, from gross earthliness into vapour and odour which went up in wreaths of fragrance

acceptable to God. So we are to be laid upon the divine altar. So, because we have been accepted in the Beloved, and have received the atonement for our sins through His great sacrifice, we are to be consecrated to His service and, touched by the fire which He sends down, we are to be changed into a sweet odour acceptable to Him as were 'the saints which are in Ephesus.'

## **II. Further, Christian men are saints because they are believers.**

'The saints' and 'the faithful' are not two sets of people, but one. The Apostle starts, as it were, on the surface, and goes down; takes off the uppermost layer and lets us see what is below it; begins with the flowers or the fruit, and then carries us to the root. The saints are saints because they are first of all faithful. 'Faithful' here, of course, does not mean, as it usually does in our ordinary language, 'true' and 'trustworthy,' 'reliable' and 'keeping our word,' but it means simply 'believing'; having faith, not in the sense of fidelity, but in the sense of trust.

So, then, here is Paul's notion - and it is not only Paul's notion, it is God's truth - that the only way by which a man ever comes to realise that he belongs to God, and to yield himself in glad surrender to His uses, and so to become pure and holy like Him whom He loves and aspires to, is by humble faith in Jesus Christ. If you want to talk in theological terminology, sanctification follows upon faith. It is when we believe and trust in Jesus Christ that all the great motives begin to tell upon life and heart, which deliver us from our selfishness, which bind us to God, which make it a joy to do anything for His service, which kindle in our hearts the flame of fructifying and consecrating and transforming love. Faith, the simple reliance of a desperate and therefore trusting heart upon Jesus Christ for all that it needs, is the foundation of the loftiest elevation and attainment of the Christian character. We begin down there that we may set the shining topstone of 'Holiness to the Lord' upon the heaven-pointing summit of our lives.

Note how here Paul sets forth the object of our faith and the blessedness of it. I do not think I am forcing too much meaning into his words when I ask you to notice with what distinct emphasis and intentional fulness he employs the double name of our Lord here to describe the object upon which our faith fixes, 'Faithful in Christ Jesus.' We must lay hold of the Manhood, and we must lay hold of the office. We must rest our soul's salvation on Him as our brother, Jesus who was incarnate in sinful flesh for us; and we must also rest it on Him as God's anointed, who came in human flesh to fulfil the divine loving-kindness and purposes, and in that flesh to die. A faith in a Jesus who was not a Christ would not sanctify; a faith in a Christ who is not Jesus would be impalpable and impotent. We must take the two together, believing and feeling that we lay hold upon a loving Man, 'bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh'; and also upon Him who in His very humanity is the Messenger and Angel of God's covenant; the Christ for whom the way has been being prepared from the beginning, and who has come to fulfil all the purposes of the divine heart.

And notice, too, how there is suggested here also, the blessedness of that faith, inasmuch as it is a faith in Christ. The New Testament speaks in diverse ways about the relation between the believing soul and Jesus Christ. It sometimes speaks of faith as being towards Him, and that suggests the going out of a hand that, as it were, stretches towards what it would lay hold of. It sometimes speaks of faith as being on Him, which suggests the idea of a building on its foundation, or a hand leaning on a support. And it sometimes speaks, as here, of faith being 'in Him,' which suggests the folded wings of the dove that has found its nest, the repose of faith, the quiet rest in the Lord, and 'waiting patiently for Him.' Such trust so directed is the one condition of such tranquillity. Then, again, note a Christian is all that he is because he is 'in Christ.' That phrase 'in Him' is in some sense the keynote of this Epistle to the Ephesians. If you will look over the letter, and pick out all the connections in which the expression 'in Him' occurs, I think you will be astonished to see how rich and full are its uses, and how manifold the blessings of which it is the condition. But the use which Paul makes of it here is just this - everything in our Christian life depends upon our being rooted and grafted in Jesus. Dear brethren, the main weakness, I believe, of what is called Evangelical Christianity has been that it has not always kept true to the proportionate prominence which the New Testament gives to the two thoughts, 'Christ for us,' and 'Christ in us.' For one sermon that you have heard which has dwelt earnestly and believingly on the thought of the indwelling Christ and the Christian indwelling in Him, you have heard a hundred about the Sacrifice on the Cross for sins, and the great atonement that was made by it. Those of you, who have listened to me from Sunday to Sunday, know that I am not to be charged with minimizing or neglecting that truth, but I want to lay upon all your hearts this earnest conviction, that 'a gospel which throws into enormous prominence 'Christ for us,' and into very small prominence 'Christ in us,' is lame of one foot, is lopsided, untrue to the symmetry and proportion of the Gospel as it is revealed in the New Testament, and will never avail for the nourishment and maturity of Christian souls. 'Christ for us' by all means, and for evermore, but 'Christ in us,' or else He will not be 'for us.'

## **III. Lastly, a Christian may be a saint, and a believer, and in Christ Jesus, though he is in Ephesus.**

Many of you know that probably the words 'in Ephesus' are no part of the original text of this epistle, which was apparently a circular letter, in which the designation of the various churches to which it was sent was left blank, to be filled in with the name of each little community to which Paul's messenger from Rome carried it. The copy from which our text was taken had probably been delivered at Ephesus; and, at any rate, one of the copies would go there. What was Ephesus? Satan's very headquarters and seat in Asia Minor, a focus of idolatry, superstition, wealth, luxury springing from commerce, and moral corruption. 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians.' The books of Ephesus were a synonym for magical books. Many of us know how rotten to the core the society of that great city was. And

there, on the dunghill, was this little garden of fragrant and flowering plants. They were 'saints in Christ Jesus,' though they were 'saints in Ephesus.'

Never mind about surroundings. It is possible for us to keep ourselves in the love of God, and in the fellowship of His Son wherever we are, and whatever may be around us. You and I have too to live in a big, wicked city, and to work out our religion in a society honeycombed with corruption, because of commerce and other influences. Do not let us forget that these people whom Paul called 'saints' and 'faithful' had a harder fight to wage than we have, with less to hearten and strengthen them in it. Only remember if the 'saints in Ephesus' are to be 'in Christ,' they need to keep themselves very straight up. The carbonic acid gas is heavy and goes down to the bottom of the cave, and if a man will walk bolt upright, he will keep his nostrils above it; but if he stoops, he will get down into it. Walk straight up, with your head erect, looking to the Master, and your respiratory organs will be above the poison. If we are to be in Christ when we are in

Ephesus, we need to keep ourselves separate and faithful, and to keep ourselves in Christ. If the diver comes out of the diving-bell he is drowned. If he keeps inside its crystal walls he may be on the bottom of the ocean, but he is dry and safe. Keep in the fortress by loyal faith, by humble realisation of His presence, by continual effort, and 'nothing shall by any means harm you,' but 'your lives shall be holy, being hid with Christ in God.'

## **ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS** **by Alexander Maclaren**

'Blessed be God... who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.' - Ephesians 1:3.

IT is very characteristic of Paul's impetuous fervour and exuberant faith that he begins this letter with a doxology, and plunges at once into the very heart of his theme. Colder natures reach such heights by slow degrees. He gains them at a bound, or rather, he dwells there always. Put a pen into his hand; and it is like tapping a blast furnace; and out rushes a fiery stream at white heat. But there is a great deal more than fervour in the words. In the rush of hid thoughts there is depth and method. We come slowly after, and try by analysing and meditation to recover some of the fervour and the fire of such utterances as this.

Notice that buoyant, joyous, emphatic reiteration: 'Blessed,' 'blest,' 'blessings.' That is more than the fascination exercised over a man's mind by a word; it covers very deep thoughts and goes very far into the centre of the Christian life. God blesses us by gifts; we bless Him by words. The aim of His act of blessing is to evoke in our hearts the love that praises. We receive first, and then, moved by His mercies, we give. Our highest response to His most precious gifts is that we shall 'take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord,' and in the depth of thankful and recipient hearts shall say, 'Blessed be, God who hath blessed us.'

Now I think that I shall best bring out the deep meaning of these words if I simply follow them as they lie before us. I do not wish to say anything about our echo in blessing God, I wish to speak about the original sweet sound, His blessing to us.

### **I. And I note, first of all, the character and the extent of these blessings which are the constituents of the Christian life.**

All, spiritual, blessings; says the Apostle. Now, I am not going to weary you with mere exegetical remarks, but I do want to lay stress upon this, that, when the Apostle speaks about 'spiritual blessings,' he does not merely use that word 'spiritual' as defining the region in us in which the blessings are given, though that is also implied; but rather as pointing to the medium by which they are conferred. That is to say, he calls them 'spiritual,' not because they are, unlike material and outward blessings,

gifts for the inner man, the true self, but because they are imparted to the waiting spirit by that Divine Spirit who communicates to men all the most precious things of God. They are 'spiritual' because the Holy Spirit is the medium of communication by which they reach men's spirit.

And I may just pause for one moment - and it shall only be for a moment - to point out to you how inwoven into the very texture of the writer's thoughts, and all the more emphatic because quite incidental, and needing to be looked for to be found, is here the evidence of his believing that the name of God was God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For it is the Father who is the Giver, the Son who is the Reservoir, the Spirit who is the Communicator, of these spiritual gifts. And I do not think that any man could have written these words of my text, the main purpose of which is altogether different to setting forth the mystery of the divine nature, unless he had believed in God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

But, apart altogether from that, let me remind you in one sentence of how the gifts which thus come to men by that Divine Spirit derive their characteristic quality from their very medium of communication. There are many other blessings for which we have to say, 'Blessed be God'; for all the gifts that come from 'the Father of Lights' are light, and everything that the Fountain of sweetness

bestows upon mankind is sweet, but earthly blessings are but the shadow of blessing. They remain without us, and they pass. And if they were all for which we had to praise God, our praises had need to be often checked by sobs and tears, and often very doubtful and questioning. If there were none other but such, and if this poor life were all, then I do not think it would be true that it is 'better to have loved and lost, Than never to have loved stall.'

It is but a quavering voice of praise, with many a sob between, that goes up to bless God for anything but spiritual blessings. Though it is true that all which comes from the Father of Lights is light, the sorrows and troubles that He sends have the light terribly muffled in darkness, and it needs strong faith and insight, to pierce through the cloud to see the gleam of anything bright beneath. But when we turn to this other region, and think of what comes to every poor, tremulous, human heart, that likes to take it through that Divine Spirit - the forgiveness of sins, the rectification of errors, the purification of lusts and passions, the gleams of hope on the future, and the access with confidence into the standing and place of children: oh, then surely we can say, 'Blessed be God for spiritual blessings.'

But if the word which defines may thus seem to limit, the other word which accompanies it sweeps away every limit; for it calls upon us to bless God for all spiritual blessings. That is to say, there is no gap in His gift. It is rounded and complete and perfect. Whatever a man's needs may require, whatever his hopes can dream, whatever his wishes can stretch out towards, it is all here, compacted and complete. The spiritual gifts are encyclopaedical and all-sufficient, They, are not, segments, but completed circles. When God gives He gives amply.

## **II. So much, then, for the first point; now, in the second place, note the one divine act by which all these blessings have been bestowed.**

'Blessed be God who has given'; or, still more definitely, pointing to some one specific moment and deed in which the benefaction was completed, 'Blessed be God who gave.'

When? Well, ideally in the depths of His own eternal mind the gift was complete or ever the recipients were created to receive it, and historically the gift was complete in the act of redemption when He spared not His Own Son, but gave Him up unto the death for us all. A man may destine an estate for the benefit of some community which for generations long may continue to enjoy its benefits, but the gift. is complete when he signs the deed that makes it over. Humphrey Chetham gave the boys in his school to-day their education when, centuries ago, he assigned his property to that beneficent purpose. So, away back in the mists of Eternity the gift was completed, and the signature was put to the deed when Jesus Christ was born, and the seal was added when Jesus Christ died. 'Blessed be God who hath given.'

So, then, we may not only draw the conclusion which the Apostle drew, 'how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' but we can draw an even grander one, 'Has He not with Him also freely given us all things?' And we possess them all to-day if our hearts are resting on Jesus Christ, The limit of the gift is only in ourselves. All. has been given, but the question remains how much has been taken.

Oh, Christian men and women, there is nothing that we require more than to have what we have, to possess what is ours, to make our own what has been bestowed. You sometimes hear of some beggar, or private soldier, or farm laborer, who has come all at once into an estate that was his, years before he knew anything about it. There is such a boundless wealth belonging by right, and by the Giver's gift, to every Christian soul; and yet, here are we, many of us, like the paupers who sometimes turn up in workhouses, all in rags, and with deposit-receipts for L200 or L300 stitched into the rags, that they get no good out of. Here are we, with all that wealth, paupers still. Be, sure that you have what you have. Do you remember the exhortation to a valiant effort in one of the stories in the Old Testament - 'Know ye that Ramoth-gilead is ours, and we take it not?' And that is exactly what is true about hosts of professing Christians who have not, in any real sense, the possession of what God has given them. It is well to ask, for our desires are the measures of our capacities. It is well to ask, but we very often ask when what is wanted is not that we should get more, but that we should utilize what we have. And we make mistakes therein, as if God needed to be besought to give, when all the while it is we who need to be stirred up to grasp and keep the things that are freely given to us of God.

## **III. In the next place, notice the one place where all these blessings are kept.**

'Blessed be God who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings-in heavenly places.' 'In heavenly places.' Now that does not merely define the region of origin, the locality where they originated or whence they come. It does do that, but it does a great deal more. It does not merely tell us, as we often are posed to think that it does, that 'every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down' - though that is perfectly true, but it means much rather that in order to get the gift we must go up. They are in the heavenly places, and they cannot live anywhere else. They have been sticking shrubs in tubs outside our public buildings this last week. How long will they keep their leaves and their freshness? How soon will they need to be shifted and taken back again to the sweeter air, where they can flourish? God's spiritual gifts cannot grow in smoke and dirt and a polluted atmosphere. And if a professing Christen man lives his life on the low levels he will have very few of the heavenly gifts coming down to him there. And that is the reason - the

reason above all others - why, with such a large provision made for all possible necessities and longings of all sorts, people who call themselves Christians go up and down the world feeble and poor, and with little enjoyment of their religion, and having verified scarcely anything of the great promises which God has given them.

Brother, according to the old word with which the Mass used to begin, 'Sursum corda' - up with your hearts! The blessings are in the heavens, and if we want them we must go where they are. It is not enough to drink sparing draughts from the stream as it flows through the plain. Travel up to the headwaters, where the great pure fountain is, that gushes out abundant and inexhaustible. The gifts are heavenly, and there they abide, and thither we must mount if we would possess them.

Now that this understanding of the words is correct I think is clearly shown by a verse in the next chapter, where we find the very same phrase employed. In this connection the Apostle says that 'God hath raised us up together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' That is to say, the true ideal of the Christian life is that, even here and now, it is a life of such intimate union and 'incorporation with Jesus Christ as that where He is we are, and that even whilst we tabernacle upon earth and move about amongst its illusions and changing scenes, in the depth of our true being we may be fixed, and sit at rest with Christ where He is.

Do not dismiss that as mere pulpit rhetoric. Do not say that it is mystical and incomprehensible, and cannot be reduced into practice amidst the distractions of daily life. Brethren, it is not so! Jesus Christ Himself said about Himself that He came down from heaven, and that though He did, even whilst He wore the likeness of the flesh, and was one of us, He was 'the Son of Man which is in Heaven,' when He lay in the manger, when He worked at the carpenter's bench in Nazareth, when He walked with weary feet those blessed acres, when He hung, for our advantage, on the bitter Cross. And that was no incommunicable property of His mysterious nature, but it was the typical example of what it is possible for manhood to be. And you and I, if we are to possess in any measure corresponding with the gift of Christ the spiritual blessing which God bestows, must have our lives 'hid with Christ in God,' and sit together with Him in the heavenly places.

#### **IV. Lastly, note the one Person in whom all spiritual blessings are enshrined.**

'In the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' You cannot separate between Him and His gifts, neither in the way of getting Him without them, nor in the way of getting them without Him. They are Himself, and in the deepest analysis all spiritual blessings are reducible to one - viz. that the Spirit of Jesus Christ-Himself shall dwell with us.

Now, that union by which it is possible for poor, empty, sinful creatures to be filled with His fulness, animated with His life, strengthened with His omnipotence, and sanctified by His indwelling - that union is the very kernel of this Epistle to the Ephesians.

I dare say I have often drawn your attention to the singular emphasis and repetition with which that phrase 'in Christ' occurs throughout the letter. Just take the two or three instances of it that I gather as I speak. In this first chapter we read, 'the faithful in Jesus Christ,' Then comes our text, 'blessings in heavenly places in Christ.' Then, in the very next verse, we read, 'chosen us in Him.' Then, a verse or two after, we have 'accepted in the Beloved,' which is immediately followed by, 'in whom we have redemption through His blood.' Then, again, 'that He might gather together in one all things in Christ, in whom also we have obtained the inheritance' I need not make other quotations, but throughout the letter every blessing that can gladden or sanctify the human spirit is regarded by the Apostle as being stored and shrined in Jesus Christ: inseparable from Him, and therefore to be bound by us only in union with Him

And that is the point of all which I want to say - viz. that, inasmuch as all spiritual blessings that a soul can need are hived in Him in whom is all sweetness, the way, and the only way, to get them is that we too, should pass into Him and dwell in Jesus, Christ. It is His own teaching: 'I am the Vine, ye are the branches. Abide in Me. Separate. from Me ye can do nothing,' and get nothing, and are nothing.

Oh, brethren! it is well that all .our treasures should be in one place. It is better that they should all be in One Person. And if only we will lay our poor emptiness by the side of His fulness there will pass over from that infinite abundance and sufficiency everything that we can require.

We abide in Him by faith, by meditation, by love, by submission, by practical obedience, and, if we are wise, the effort of our lives will be to keep close to that Lord. As long as we keep touch with Him we have all and abound. Break the connection by wandering away, in thought and desire, by indulgence in sin, by letting earthly passions surge in and separate us from Him - break the connection by rebellion, by making ourselves our own ends and lords, and it is like switching off the electricity,

Everything falls dead. You cannot have Christ's blessing unless you take Christ.

And so, dear brethren, 'abide in Me and I in you: There is nothing else that will make us blessed; there is nothing else that will meet all the circumference of our necessities; there is nothing else that will quiet our hearts, will sanctify our understandings. Christ is

yours if 'ye are Christ's.' 'Of His fulness have all we received,' for it all became ours when we Became His, and Christian growth on earth and heaven is But the unfolding of the folded graces that are contained in Him. We possess the whole Christ, but eternity is needed to disclose all the unsearchable riches of our inheritance in Him.

## ACCORDING TO - Part 1 by Alexander Maclaren

'According to the good pleasure of His will... According to the riches of His grace.' - Ephesians 1:5, 7.

THAT phrase, 'according to,' is one of the key-words of this profound epistle, which occurs over and over again, like a refrain. I reckon twelve instances of it in three chapters of the letter, and they all introduce one or other of the two thoughts which appear in the two fragments that I have taken for my text. They either point out how the great blessings of Christ's mission have underlying them the divine purpose, or they point out how the process of the Christian life in the individual has for its source and measure the abundances, the wealth of the grace and the power of God. So in both aspects the facts of earth are traced up to, and declared to be, the outcome of the heavenly depths, and that gives solemnity, grandeur, elevation, to this epistle all its own. We are carried, as it were, away up into the recesses of the mountains of God, and we look down upon the unruffled, mysterious, deep lake, from which come the rivers that water all the plains beneath.

Now of these two types of reference to the divine will and the divine wealth, I should like to gather together the instances, as they occur in this letter, in so far as I can, in the course of a sermon, touching them, it must be, very imperfectly. But I fear that it is impossible to deal with both the phases of this 'according to,' in one discourse. So I confine myself to that which is suggested by the first of our two texts, in the hope that some other day we may be able to overtake the other. So then, we have set before us here the Christian thought of the divine will which underlies, and therefore is manifest by, the work of Jesus Christ, in its whole sweep and breadth. And I just take up the various instances in which this expression occurs in a great variety of forms, but all retaining substantially the same meaning.

### **I. Note that that divine will which underlies and is operative in, and therefore is certified to us by the whole work of Jesus Christ, in its facts and its consequences, is a 'good pleasure.'**

Now there are few thoughts which the history of the world has shown to be more productive of iron and steel in the human character than that of the sovereign will of God. That made Islam, and is the secret of its power today, amidst its many corruptions. Because these wild desert tribes were all stiffened, or I might say inflamed, by that profound conviction, the sore-reign will of God, they came down like a hammer upon that corrupt so-called Christian Church, and swept it off the face of the earth, as it deserved to be swept. And the same thought of the sovereign will, of which we are but instruments-pawns on its chess-board - made the grand seventeenth century Puritanism in England, and its sister type of men and of religion in Holland. For this is a historically proved thesis, that there is nothing which so contributes to the formation, and valuation of, and the readiness to die for, civil liberty, as the firm grasp of that thought of the divine sovereignty. Just because a man realises that the will of God is supreme over all the earth, he rebels against all forms of human despotism.

But with all the good that is in that great thought - and the Christianity of this day sorely wants the strength that might be given it by the exhibition of that steel medicine - it wants another, 'the good pleasure of His will.' And that word, 'good pleasure, does not express, as I think, in Paul's usage of it, the simple notion of sovereignty, but always the notion Of a benevolent sovereignty. It is 'the good pleasure' - as it is put in another place by the same Apostle - 'of His goodness.' And that thought, let in upon the solemnity and severity of the other one, is all that it needs in order to make the man who grasps it not only a hero in conflict, and a patient martyr in endurance, but a child in his Father's house, rejoicing in the love of his Father everywhere and always.

Paul would have us believe that if we will take the work of Jesus Christ in the facts of His life, and its results upon humanity, as our horn-book and lesson, we shall draw from that some conceptions of the great thing that underlies it, 'the good pleasure of His will.' We stand in front of this complex universe, and some of us say: 'Law'; and some of us say: 'A Lawgiver behind the law; a Person at the heart of all things'; but unless we can say: 'And in the heart of the Person a will, which is the expression of a steadfast, omnipotent love,' then the World seems to me to be a place of unsolvable riddles and a torture-house. There goes the great steam-roller along the road. Everybody can see that it crushes down, and makes its own path. Who drives it? The steam in the boiler, or is there a hand on the lever? And what drives the hand? Christianity answers, and answers with unfaltering lip, rising clear above contradictions apparent and difficulties real, 'The good pleasure of His will,' and there men can rest.

Then there is another step. Another form in which this 'according to' appears in this letter is, if we adopt the rendering, which I am disposed to do in the present case, of the Authorised Version rather than of the Revised, 'according to His good pleasure... which

He hath purposed in Himself,' The Revised Version says, 'Which He hath purposed in Him,' and that is a perfectly possible rendering. But to me the old one is not only more eloquent, but more in accordance with the connection. So I venture to accept it without further ado - 'His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself.'

That brings us into the presence of that same great thought, which in another aspect is expressed in saying 'His name. is Jehovah,' and in yet another aspect is expressed in saying 'God is love,' viz. the thought, which sounds familiar, but which has in it depths of strength and illumination and joy, if We rightly ponder it, that, to use human words, the motive of the divine action is all found within the divine nature.

We love one another because, we discern, or think we discern, lovable qualities in the being on whom our love falls. God loves because He is God. That great artesian fountain wells up from the depths, by its own sweet impulse, and pours itself out; and 'the good pleasure of, His goodness' has no other explanation than that it is His nature and property to be merciful. And so, dear brethren, we get clean past what has sometimes been the misapprehension of good people, and has oftener been the caricatured representation of Evangelical truth which its enemies have put forth - that God was made to love and pity by reason of the sacrifice of the Son, whereas the very opposite is the case. God loves, therefore He sent His Son, 'that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life,' and the notion of the Cross of Christ as changing the divine heart is as far away from Evangelical truth as it is from the natural conceptions that men form of the divine nature. We shake hands with our so-called antagonists and say, 'Yes! we believe as much as you do that God does not love us because Christ died, but we believe what perhaps you do not, that Christ died because God loves us, and would save us.' 'The good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself.'

Then, still further, there is another aspect of this same divine will brought out in other parts of this letter, of which this is a specimen, 'Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fulness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ,' which, being turned into more modern phraseology, is just this - that the great aim of that divine sovereign will, self-originated, full of loving-kindness to the world, is to manifest to all men what God is, that all men may know Him for what He is, and thereby be drawn back again, and grouped in peaceful unity round His Son, Jesus Christ. That is the intention which is deepest in the divine heart, the desire which God has most for every one of us. And when the Old Testament tells us that the great motive of the divine action is for 'My own Name's sake,' that expression might be so regarded as to disclose an ugly despot, who only wants to be revered by abject and submissive subjects. But what it really means is this, that the divine love which hovers over its poor, prodigal children because it is love, and, therefore, lovingly delights in a loving recognition and response, desires most of all that all the wanderers should see the light, and that every soul of man should be able to whisper, with loving heart, the name, 'Abba! Father!' Is not that an uplifting thought as being the dominant motive which puts in action the whole of the divine activity? God created in order that He might fling His light upon creatures, who should thereby be glad. And God has redeemed in order that in Jesus Christ we might see Him, and, seeing Him, be at rest, and begin to grow like Him - This is the aim, 'That they might know Thee, the only true God ... whom to know is eternal life.' And so self-communication and self-revelation is the very central mystery of the will.

But that is not all. Another of the forms in which this phrase occurs tells us that that great purpose, the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, was that, 'Now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known' by the Church 'the manifold wisdom of God.' And so we get another thought, that that whole work of redemption, operated by the Incarnation, and culminating in the Crucifixion and Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, stands as being the means by which other orders of creatures, besides ourselves, learn to know 'the manifold wisdom of God.' According to the grand old saying, at Creation the 'morning stars sang together for joy.' All spiritual creatures; be they 'higher' or 'lower,' can only know God by the observation of His acts.

**'Twas great to speak a world from nought,  
'Tis greater to redeem,'**

and the same angelic lips that sang these praises on the morning of Creation have learnt a new song that they sing: 'Glory and honour and dominion and power be unto the Lamb that was slain.'

Thus to principalities and powers, a diviner height in the loftiness, and a diviner depth in the condescension, and a diviner tenderness in the love, and a diviner energy in the power, of the redeeming God have been made known, and this is the thought of His eternal purpose. And that brings me to another point which is involved in the words that I have just quoted, which stand in connection with those that I have previously referred to. The phrase 'eternal purpose' literally rendered is, 'the purpose of the ages,' and that, no doubt; may mean 'eternal' in the sense of running on through all the ages; or it may mean, perhaps, that which we usually attach to the word 'eternal,' viz. unbeginning and unending. I take the former meaning as the more probable one, that the Apostle contemplates that great will of God which culminates in Jesus Christ, as coming solemnly sweeping through all the epochs of time from the beginning. In a deeper sense than the poet meant it, 'Through the ages an increasing purpose runs, and that binds the epochs of humanity together - 'the purpose of God in Christ Jesus.' The philosophy of history lies there; and it is a true instinct

that makes the cradle at Bethlehem the pivot around which the world's chronology revolves. For the deepest thing about all the ages on the further side of it is that they are 'Before Christ,' and the formative fact for all the ages after it is that they are Anno Domini.

And now the last thing that is suggested by yet another of these eloquent expressions is deduced from another part of the same phrase. The purpose of the ages is described as that which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Now the word 'purposed' literally is 'made.' And it may be a question whether 'purposed' or 'accomplished' is the special meaning to be attached to the general word 'made.' Either is legitimate. I take it that what the Apostle means here is that the purpose of God, which we have thus seen as sovereign, self-originated, having for its great aim the communication to all His creatures of the knowledge of Himself, and running through the ages, and binding them into a unity, reaches its entire accomplishment in the Cradle, and the Cross, and the Throne of Jesus Christ our Lord.

He fulfils the divine intention. There is that one life, and in that life alone of humanity you have a character which is in entire sympathy with the divine mind, which is in full possession of the divine truth, which never diverges or deviates by a hair's-breadth from the divine will, which is the complete and perfect exponent to man of the divine heart and character; and that Christ is the fulfilment of all that God desired in the depths of eternity, and the abysses of His being. Did He will that men should know Him? Christ has declared Him. Did He will that men should be drawn back to Him? Christ lifted on the Cross draws all men unto Him. Was it 'according to the good pleasure of His goodness' that we men should attain to the adoption of sons? By that Son we too became sons. Was it the purpose of His will that we should obtain an 'inheritance'? We obtain it in Jesus Christ, 'being heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.' All that God willed to do is done. And when we look, on the one hand, up to that infinite purpose, and on the other, to the Cross, we hear from the dying Him, 'It is finished!' The purpose of the ages is accomplished in Christ Jesus.

Is it accomplished with you? I have been speaking about the divine counsel which is a 'good pleasure,' which runs through the whole history of mankind, But it is a divine purpose that you can thwart as far as you are concerned. 'How often would I have gathered... and ye would not,' and your 'would not' neutralises His 'would.' Do not stand in the way of the steam-roller. You cannot stop it, but it can crush you. Do not have Him say about you, 'In vain have I smitten, in vain have I loved.' Bow, accept, recognise that all God's armoury is brought to bear upon each of us in that great Cross and Passion, in that great Incarnation and human life. And I beseech you, in your hearts, let the will of God be done even as for a world it has been done by the sacrifice of Calvary.

## ACCORDING TO - Part 2

'According to the riches of His grace.' - Ephesians 1:7.

WE have seen, in a previous sermon, that a characteristic note of this letter is the frequent occurrence of that phrase 'according to.' I also then pointed out that it was employed in two different directions. One class of passages, with which I then tried to deal, used it to compare the divine purpose in our salvation with the historical process of the salvation. The type of that class of reference is found in a verse just before my text, 'according to the good pleasure of His will.' There is a second class of passages to which our text belongs, where the comparison is not between the purpose and its realisation, but between the stores of the divine riches and the experiences of the Christian life. The one set of passages suggests the ground of our salvation in the deep purpose of God; the other suggests the measure of the power which is working out that salvation.

The instances of this second use of the phrase, besides the one in my text, 'according to the riches of His grace,' are such as these: 'According to the riches of His glory'; 'According to the power that worketh in us'; 'According to the measure of the gift of Christ'; 'According to the energy of the might of His power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.'

Now it is clear that all these are varying forms of the same thing. They vary in form, they are identical in substance. What a Jew calls a 'cubit' an Englishman calls a 'foot,' but the result is pretty nearly the same. Shillings, marks, francs, are various standards; they all come to substantially the same result. These varying measures of the divine gift which is at work in man's salvation, have this in common, that they all run out into God's immeasurable, unlimited power, boundless wealth. And so, if we gather them together, and try to focus them in a few words, they may help to widen our conceptions of what we ought to expect from God, to bow us in contrition as to the small use that we have made of it, and to open our desires wide, that they may be filled.

I only aspire, then, to deal with these four forms which I have already suggested.

### **I. The measure of our possible attainments is the whole wealth of God. 'According to the riches of His grace.'**

Another angle at which the same thought is viewed appears in another part of the letter, where we have this variation in the expression, 'According to the riches of His glory.' 'Grace' and 'Glory' are generally opposed antithetically; in this epistle they are united, for in the verse before my text I read: 'To the praise of the glory of His grace.' So the first thought is, the whole wealth of God is available for every Christian soul.



Now it seems to me that there are very few things that the popular Christianity of this day needs more than a furnishing up of the familiar old Christian terminology, which has largely lost the freshness and the power that it once had. They tell us that these incandescent burners, that we are using nowadays, are very much more bright when they are first fixed than after the mantle gets a little worn. So it is with the terminology of Christianity. It needs to be re-stated, not in such a way as to take the pith out of it, which is what a great deal of the modern craze for re-statement means, but in such a way as to brighten it up again, and to invest it with something of the 'celestial light' with which it was 'apparelled' when it first came. Now that word 'grace,' I have no doubt, sounds to you hard, theological, remote. But what does it mean? It gathers into one burning point the whole of the rays of that conception of God, with which it is the glory of Christianity to have flooded and drenched the world. It tells us that at the heart of the universe there is a heart; that God is Love, that that love is the motive-spring of His activity, that it comes and bends over the lowliest with a smile of amity on its lips, with healing and help in its hands, with forgiveness for all sins against itself, with boundless wealth for the poorest, and that the wealth of His self-communicating love is the measure of the wealth that each of us may possess.

God gives 'according to the riches of His grace.' You do not expect a millionaire to give half-a-crown, to a subscription fund; and God gives royally, divinely, measuring His bestowments by the abundance of His treasures, and handing over with an open palm large gifts of coined money, because there are infinite Chests of uncirculated bullion in the deep storehouses. 'How great is Thy goodness which Thou hast manifested before the sons of men for them that fear Thee. How much greater is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up in store.' But whilst He gives all, the question comes to be: What do I receive? The measure of His gift is His measureless grace; the measure of my reception is my - alas! easily-measured faith. What about the unearned increment? What about the unrealized wealth? Too many of us are like some man who has a great estate in another land. He knows nothing about it, and is living in grimy poverty in a back street, For you have all God's riches waiting for you, and 'the potentiality of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice' at your beck and call, and yet you are but poorly realizing your possible riches. Alas, that when we might have so much we do have so little. 'According to the riches of His grace' He gives. But another 'according to' comes in. 'According to thy faith be it unto thee.' So we have to take these two measures together, and the working limit of our possession of God's riches comes out of the combination of them both.

Let me remind you, before I pass on, of what I have already suggested is but another phase of this same thought. Paul says in this epistle that God gives not only 'according to the riches of His grace,' but 'according to the riches of His glory,' and that the latter expression is substantially identical with the former, is plain from the combination of the two in an earlier verse of this chapter: 'To the praise of the glory of His grace.' Thus we come to the blessed thought that the glory of God is essentially the revelation of that stooping, pitying, pardoning, enriching love. Not in the physical attributes, not in the characteristics of the divine nature which part Him off from men, and make Him remote, both from their conceptions and their affections, but in the love that bends to them is the true glory of God. All these other things are but the fringes; the centre of glory is the Love, which is the mightiest and the divinest thing in the Might Divine. The sunshine is far stronger than the lightning, and there is more force developed in the rain than in an earthquake. That truth is what Christianity has made the common possession of the world. It has thereby broken the chains of dread; it has bridged over the infinite distance. It has given us a God that can love and be loved, can stoop and can lift, can pardon and can purify. 'According to the good pleasure of His goodness,' - there is the foundation of our salvation. 'According to the riches of His grace,' - there is the measure of our salvation.

## **II. We have another form of the same measure in another set of verses which speak of the present working of God's power.**

The Apostle speaks in regard to his own apostolic commission of its being given **according to the working of His power**; and he speaks of all Christian men as receiving gifts 'according to the power that worketh in us.' So there we have a standard that comes, at it were, a little closer to ourselves. We do not need to travel up into the dim abysses above, or think of the sanctities and the secrecies of that divine heart in the light which is inaccessible, but we have the measure in ourselves.

The standards of length are kept at Greenwich, the standards of capacity are kept in the Tower; but there are local standards distributed throughout the land to which men may go and have their measures corrected. And so besides all these lofty thoughts about the grace and the glory which measures His gift, we can turn within, if we are Christian people, and say,

### **'According to the power that worketh in us.'**

Ah, brethren! there are few things that we want more than to revive and deepen the conviction that in every Christian man, by virtue of his faith, and in proportion to his faith, there is in operation an actual, superhuman, divine power molding his nature, guiding, quietening, ennobling, lifting, confirming, and hallow-ing and shaping him into conformity with Jesus Christ. I would that we all believed not as a dogma, but realised as a personal experience, that irrefragable truth, 'Know ye not that the Spirit of Christ dwelleth in you, except ye be reprobate?' The life of self is evil; the life of Christ in self is good, and only good. And if you are Christian men, and in the proportion, as I have said, in which you are living by faith, you have working in your spirits the very Spirit of Christ Himself.

And that power is the measure of your possibilities. Obviously 'the power that worketh in us' is able to do a great deal more than it is

doing in any of us. And so with deep significance the Apostle, side by side with his adducing of this power as being the measure of our possible attainments, speaks about God as being 'able to do for us, exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.' 'The power that works in us' transcends in its possibilities our present experience, it transcends our conceptions, it transcends our desires. It is able to do everything; it actually does - well, you know what it does in you. And the responsibility of hampering and hindering that power from working out its only adequately corresponding results lies at our own doors. 'A rushing, mighty wind' - yes; and in myself a scarcely perceptible breathing, and often a dead calm, stagnant as in the latitudes on either side of the Equator, where, for long, dreary days, no freshening motion in the atmosphere is perceptible. 'A fire?' - yes; then why is my grate full of grey, cold ashes, and one little spark in the corner? 'A fountain springing into everlasting life?' - yes; then why in my basin is there so much scum and ooze, mud and defilement, and so little of the flashing and brilliant water? 'The power that works in us' is sorely hindered by the weakness in which it works.

### **III. In the third place another form of this measure is stated by the Apostle, 'According to the measure of the gift of Christ.'**

That means, of course, the gift which Christ bestows. It is substantially the same idea as I have just been dealing with, only looked at from rather a different point of view. Therefore, I need not dwell upon its parallelism with what has just been occupying our attention, but rather ask you simply to consider one point in reference to it, and that is that, side by side with the reference to the gift of Christ as being the measure of our possible attainments, the Apostle enlarges on the infinite variety of the shapes which that one gift takes in different people. 'He gave some apostles, some prophets,' etc.; one man receiving according to this fashion, and another according to that, and to each of us the distribution is made 'according to the measure of the gift of Christ.' That is to say, it takes us all, the collective goodness and beauty of the whole community of saints, to approximate to the fulness of that gift, and all are needed in their different types and forms of excellence, sanctity and beauty, in order to set forth, even imperfectly, the richness and the manifoldness of His great gift. And so 'we all come' - there is a multiplicity - 'unto the perfect man, the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' - there is a unity in which the multiplicity inheres.

So try to get a little more of some different type of excellence than that to which you are naturally inclined. Seek, and consciously endeavour, to appropriate into your character uncongenial excellences, and be very charitable in your judgments of the different types of Christian conformity to Christ our Lord. The crystals that are set round a light do not quarrel with each other as to whether green, or yellow, or blue, or red, or violet is the true colour to reflect. We need all the seven prismatic tints to make the perfect white light. The gift of Christ is many-sided; try not to be one-sided in your reception of it.

IV. And now the last form of this measure is 'according to the energy of the might of His power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.'

When we gazed upon the riches of God's grace, they were high above us, when we looked upon 'the power that worketh in us,' we saw it working amidst many hindrances and hamperings, but here there is presented to us in a concrete example, close beside us, of what God can make of a man when the man is wholly pliable to His will, and the recipient of His influences. And so there stands before us the guarantee and the pattern of immortal life, the Christ whose Manhood died and lives, who is clothed with a spiritual body, who wields royal authority in the Kingdom of the Most High. And that is the measure of what God can do with me, and wishes to do with me, if I will let Him. Christ is my pattern, and the measure of my own possibilities.

To be with Him, where and what He is, is the only adequate result of the power that works in us, and of the process that is already begun in us, if we are Christian people. You are sometimes - there is one eminent example of it in that great Medicean Chapel at Florence - a statue exquisitely finished in all its limbs, but one part left in the rough. That is the best that Christian people come to here. Shall it always be so? Do not the very imperfections prophesy completion, and is it not certain that the half-finished torso will be carried to the upper workshop, and be there disengaged from the dead marble and made to stand out in perfect beauty and fullest completeness? Christ is the object of our hopes, and no hopes of the Christian life are adequate to the power that works in us, or to the progress already made, which do not see in the 'energy of the might of the power' which wrought in Christ, the example and the guarantee of the exceeding greatness of 'His power which is to usward.'

And now, one last word. Besides all these passages which have been occupying us, there is another use of this same phrase in this letter which presents a very solemn and grim contrast. I can do no better with it than simply read it: 'Ye were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh' - mark the allusion to the other words that we have been referring to 'in the children of disobedience.' So there you have the alternative, either 'dead in trespasses and sins,' whilst living the physical and the intellectual life, or partaking of the life of Him 'who was dead, and is alive for ever more'; either 'walking according to the course of this world,' which is 'disobedience' and 'wrath,' or walking 'according to the power that worketh in us'; either 'putting on,' or rather continuing to wear, 'the old man which is corrupt according to the lusts which deceive,' or 'putting on the new man, which according to God is created in righteousness and holiness and truth.' The choice is before us. May God help us to choose aright!

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# GOD'S INHERITANCE AND OURS

by Alexander Maclaren

'In whom also we have obtained an inheritance,... the earnest of our inheritance.' - Ephesians 1:11, 14.

A DEWDROP twinkles into green and gold as the sun-light falls on it. A diamond flashes many colours as its facets catch the light. So, in this context, the Apostle seems to be haunted with that thought of 'inheriting' and 'inheritance,' and he recurs to it several times, but sets it at different angles, and it flashes back different beauties of radiance. For the words, which I have wrenched from (their context in the first of these two verses, are more accurately rendered, as in the Revised Version, in 'whom also we were made,' not 'have obtained' - 'an inheritance.' Whose inheritance? God's! The Christian community is God's possession. Then, in my second text, we have the converse thought - 'the earnest of our inheritance. What is the Christian's possession? The same God whose possession is the Christian. So, then, there is a deep and a wonderful relation between the believing soul and God, and however different must be the two sides of that relation, the resemblance is greater than the difference. Surely that is the deepest, most blessed, and most strength-giving conception of the Christian life. Other notions of it lay stress, and that rightly, upon certain correspondence between us and God. My faith corresponds to His faithfulness and veracity. My obedience corresponds to His authority. My weakness lays hold on His strength. My emptiness is replenished by His fulness. But here we rise above the region of correspondences into that of similarity. In these other aspects the convexity fits the concavity; in this aspect the two hemispheres go together and make the complete globe. We possess God, and God possesses us, and it is the same set of facts which are set forth in the two thoughts, 'We were made an inheritance,... the earnest of our inheritance.'

I. Now, then, let me ask you to look first at this mutual possession.

We possess God; God possesses us. What does that mean? Well, it means plainly and chiefly this, a mutual love. For we all know - and many of us thankfully can bear witness to the truth of it in our earthly relationships, - that the one way by which a human spirit can possess a spirit is by the sweet mutual love which abolishes 'mine' and 'thine,' and all but abolishes 'me' and 'thee.' And so God sets little store by the ownership which depends on divinity and creation, though, of course, that relation brings with it a duty. As the old psalm has it, 'It is He that hath made us, and we are His - still, such a relationship as this, based upon the connection that subsists between the Maker and the work of His hands, is so purely external, and a harsh, and superficial, that God does not reckon it to be a possession at all.

You perhaps remember how, in the great word which underlies all these New Testament conceptions of God's ownership of His people, viz. the charter that constituted Israel into a nation, He said, 'Ye shall be unto Me a people for a possession above all nations, for all the earth is Mine.' And yet, though that ownership and mastership extended over everything that His hands had made, He - if I might so say - contemned it, and relegated it to a secondary position, and told the people that His heart hungered for something deeper, more real, more vital than such a possession, and that therefore, just because all the earth was His, and that was not enough to satisfy His heart, He took them and made them a peculiar treasure above all nations. We have, then, to think of that great Divine Love which possesses us when He loves us, and when we love Him.

But remember that of this sweet commerce and reverberation of love which constitutes possession, the origination must be in His heart. 'We love Him because He first loved us.' The mirrors are set all round the great hall, but their surfaces are cold and lifeless until the great candelabrum in the centre is lit, and then, from every polished sheet there flashes back an echoing, answering light, and they repeat and repeat, until you scarce can tell which is the original and which is the reflection. But quench the centre, light, and the daughter-radiances vanish into darkness. The love on either side is on one side spontaneous and underived, and on the other side is secondary and evoked, but it is love on both sides. His possession of us is, as it were, the upper side, and our possession of Him is, as it were, the underside of the one golden bond. It matters not whether you look at the stream with your face to its source or with your face to its mouth, the silvery plain is the same; and the deepest tie that knits men to God is the same as the tie that knits God to men. There is mutual possession because there is mutual love.

Then again, in this same thought of mutual possession there lies a mutual surrender. For to give is the life-breath of all true love, and there is nothing which the loving heart more desires than to be able to pour itself out - much rather than any subordinate gifts - on its object. But that, if it is one-sided, is misery, and only when it is reciprocal, is it blessed. God gives Himself to us, as we know, most chiefly in that unspeakable gift of His Son, and we possess Him by virtue of His self-communication which depends upon His love. And then we possess Him, and He possesses us, not less by the answering surrender of ourselves, which is the expression of our love. No love subsists if it is only recipient; no love subsists if it is only communicated. Exports and imports must both be realised in this sweet commerce, and we enrich ourselves far more by what we give to the Beloved than by what we keep for ourselves.

The last, the hardest thing to surrender, is our own wills. To give them up by constraint is slavery that degrades. To give them up because we love is a sacrifice which sanctifies, even in the lowest reaches of daily life. And the love that knits us to God is not

invested with all its blessed possession of Him, until it has surrendered its will, and said, 'Not as I will, but as Thou wilt.' The traveller in the old fable gathered his cloak around him all the more closely, and held it the more tightly, because of the tempest that blew, but when the warm sunbeams fell he dropped it. He that would coerce my will, stiffens it into rebellion; but when a beloved one says, 'Though I might be much bold to enjoin thee, yet for love's sake I rather beseech,' then yielding is blessedness, and the giving ourselves away is the finding of God and ourselves.

I need not touch, in more than a word, upon another aspect of this mutual possession, brought into view lovingly in many parts of Scripture, and that is that there is in it not only mutual love and mutual surrender, but mutual indwelling. 'He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.'

Jesus Christ has said the same thing to us, 'I am the Vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in Me bringeth forth much fruit.' We dwell in God, possessing Him; He dwells in us, possessing us. We dwell in God, being possessed by Him. He dwells in us, being possessed by us. And He moves in the heart that loves, as the Master walking through His house, as the divinity is present in the temple, and as the soul permeates the body, and is sight in the eye and colour in the cheek, and force in the arm, and deftness in the finger, and swiftness in the foot. So the indwelling God breathes through all the capacities, and all the desires, and all the needs of the soul which He inhabits, and makes them all blessed. The very same set of facts - the presence of a divine life in the life of the believing spirit - may either be looked at from the lower end, and then they are that I possess God, and find in Him the nutriment and the stimulus for all my being, or may be looked at from the upper end, that He possesses me and finds in me capacities and a nature the emptiness of which He fills, and organs which He uses. In both cases mutual love, mutual surrender, mutual inhabitation, make up God's possession of me and my possession of God.

II. And now let me point you in a very few words to some of the plain, practical issues of this mutual possession. God's possession of us demands our consecration. 'Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price; therefore, to live for self is to fly in the face of the very purpose of Christ's mission and of God's communication of Himself to us. There are slaves who run away from their masters and 'deny the Lord that bought them.' We do that whenever, being God's slaves, we set up anything else than His will as our law, or anything else than His glory as the aim of our lives. To live for self is to die, to die to self is to live. And the solemn obligations of that most blessed possession by God of us are as solemn as the possession is blessed, and can only be discharged when we turn to Him, and yield the whole control of our nature to His merciful hand, believing that He has not only the right to dispose of us, but that His disposition of us will always coincide with our sanest conceptions of good, and our wisest desires for happiness. Yield yourselves to God, for He has yielded Himself to you, and in the yielding we realise our largest and most blessed possession. It is a good bargain to give myself and to get God.

God's possession of us not only demands consecration, but it ensures safety. Remember that great word, 'No man is able' to pluck them out of My Father's hand' God is not a careless owner who leaves His treasures to be blown by every wind, or filched by every petty robber. He is not like the king of some decrepit monarchy, slices of whose territory his neigh-hours are for ever paring off and annexing. What God has God preserves. 'He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.' 'They are Mine, saith the Lord, My jewels in the day which I make.' But our security depends on our consecration. 'No man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand.' No! But you can wriggle yourself out of your Father's hand, if you will. And the security avails only so long as you realise that you belong to God, and are living not for yourself.

Possessing God we are rich. There is nothing that is truly our wealth which remains outside of us, and can be separated from us. 'Shrouds have no pockets,' says the Spanish proverb. 'His glory shall not descend after him,'

says the grim psalm. But if God possesses me He is not going to let His treasures be lost in the grave. And if I possess Him then I shall pass through death as a beam of light does through some denser medium - a little refracted indeed, but not broken up; and I shall carry with me all my wealth to begin another world with. And that is more than you can do with the money that you make here. If you have God, you have the capital to commence a new condition of things beyond the grave.

And so that mutual possession is the real pledge of immortal life, for nothing can be more incredible than that a soul which has risen to have God for its very own, and has bowed itself to accept God's ownership of it, can be affected by such a transient and physical incident as what we call death. We rise to the assurance of immortality because we have an inheritance which is God Himself. And in that inexhaustible Inheritance there lies the guarantee that we shall live while He lives, because He lives, and until we have incorporated into our lives all the majesty and the purity and the wisdom and the power that belong to us because they are God's.

But we have to notice the two words that lie at the beginning of our first text - 'In whom we were made an inheritance.' That opens up the whole question of the means by which this mutual possession becomes possible for us men. Jesus Christ has died. That breaks the bondage under which the whole world is held. For the true slavery which interferes with the free service and the full possession of God is the slavery of self and sin. Jesus Christ has died. 'If the Son make you free ye shall be free indeed.' That great sacrifice not only 'breaks the power of cancelled sin,' but it also moves the heart, in the measure in which we truly accept it, to the love and the surrender which make the mutual possession of which we have been speaking. And so it is in Him that we become an Inheritance,

that God comes to His rights in regard to each of us. And it is in Him that we, trusting the Son, have the inheritance for ours, and 'are heirs with God, and joint heirs with Christ.' So, dear friends, if we would 'be meet for the inheritance of the saints in light,' we must unite ourselves to that Lord by faith, and through Him and faith in Him, we shall receive 'the remission of sins and inheritance among all them that are sanctified.'

## THE EARNEST AND THE INHERITANCE

'The earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession.' - Ephesians 1:14.

I HAVE dealt with a portion of this verse in conjunction with the fragment of another in this chapter. I tried to show you how much the idea of the mutual possession of God by the believing soul, and of the believing soul by God, was present to the Apostle's thoughts in this context. These two ideas are brought into close juxtaposition in the verse before us, for, as you will see if you use the Revised Version, the latter clause is there rightly paraphrased by the addition of a supplement, and reads 'until the redemption of God's own possession.' So that in the first clause we have 'our inheritance,' and in the second we have 'God's possession.' This double idea, however, has appended to it in this verse some very striking and important thoughts. The possession of both sides is regarded as incomplete, for what we have is the 'earnest' of the 'inheritance,' and 'God's own possession' has yet to be 'redeemed,' in the fullest sense of that word, at some point in the future. An 'earnest' is a fraction of an inheritance, or of a sum hereafter to be paid, and is the guarantee and pledge that the whole shall one day be handed over to the man who has received the foretaste of it in the 'earnest.' The soldier's shilling, the ploughman's 'aries,' the clod of earth and tuft of grass which, in some forms of transfer, were handed over to the purchaser, were all the guarantee that the rest was going to come. So the great future is sealed to us by the small present and the experiences of the Christian life today, imperfect, fragmentary, defective as they are, are the best prophecy and the most glorious pledge of that great tomorrow. The same law of continuity which, in application to our characters, and our work, and our daily life, makes 'to-morrow as this day, and much more abundant,' in its application to the future life makes the life here its parent, and the life yonder the prolongation and the raising to its highest power, of what is the main though often impeded tendency and direction of the present. The earnest of the 'inheritance' is the pledge until the full redemption of 'God's own possession.' I wish, then, to draw attention to these additional thoughts which are here attached to the main idea with which we were dealing in the last sermon.

### **I. And I ask you to look with me, first, at the incompleteness of the present possession.**

I tried to show in my last sermon how those great thoughts of God's having us, and our having God, rested upon the three ideas of mutual love, mutual communication, and mutual indwelling. On His side the love, the impartation, the indwelling, are all perfect. On our side they are incomplete, broken, defective; and, therefore, the incompleteness on our side hinders both God's possession of us, and our possession of Him; so that we have but the 'earnest' and not the 'inheritance.' That is to say, the ownership may be perfect in idea, but in realisation it is imperfect.

And then, if we turn to the word in the other clause, 'the redemption of the purchased possession,' that suggests the incompleteness with which God as yet owns us. For though the initial act of redeeming is complete, yet redemption is a process, and not an act. And we 'are having' it, as the Apostle says in another place very emphatically, in continual and growing experience. The estate has been acquired, but has not yet been fully subdued. For there are tribes in the jungles and in the hills who still hold out against the reign of Him who has won it for Himself. And so seeing that the redemption in its fulness is relegated to some point in the future, towards which we are progressively approximating, and seeing that the best that can be said about the Christian experience here is that we have an 'earnest of the inheritance,' we must recognise the incompleteness to-day of our possession of God, and of God's possession of us.

That is a matter of experience. We know that only too well. 'I have God' - have I? I have a drop at the bottom of a too often unsteadily held and spilling cup, and the great ocean rolls unfathomable and boundless at my feet. How partial, how fragmentary, how clouded with doubts and blank ignorance, how intermittent, and, alas! rare, is our knowledge of Him. We sometimes go down our streets between tall houses, walking in their shadow, and now and then there is a cross street down which a blaze of sunshine comes, and when we reach it, and the houses fall back, we see the blue beyond. But we go on, and we are in the shadow again. And so our earthly lives are passed, to a large extent, beneath the shade of the grimy buildings that we ourselves have put up, and which shut out heaven from us, and only now and then a slanting beam comes through some opening, and carries wistful thoughts and longings into the Empyrean beyond. And how feeble our faith, and how little of His power comes into our hearts, and how little of the joy of the Lord is realised in our daily experience we all know, and it is sometimes good for us to force ourselves to feel it is but an 'earnest' of the 'inheritance' that the best of us has.

'God has us.' Has He? Has He my will, which submits itself, and finds joy in submitting itself, to Him? How many competitors are

there for my love which come in front of Him, and we 'cannot get at Him for the press!' How many other motives are dominant in our lives, and how often we wrench ourselves away from our submission to Him, and try to set up a little dominion of our own, and say, 'Our lives are ours; who is lord over us?' Oh, brethren! we have God if we are Christians at all, and God has us. But alas! surely all honest experience tells us that there are awful gaps in the circle, and that our possession of Him, and His possession of us, are woefully incomplete.

Now, let me remind you that this incompleteness is mainly our own fault. Of course, I know that for the absolute completeness, either of my possession of God or of His of me, I must pass from out this world, and enter upon another stage and manner of being. But it is not being in the flesh, but it is being dominated by the flesh, that is the reason for the incompleteness of our mutual possession. And it is not being in the world, but it is being seduced and tyrannized over by the influx of worldly desires and thoughts, surging into our hearts, that drives God from out of our hearts, and draws us away from the sweet security of being possessed by, and living close to, Him. Death does a great deal for a man in advancing him in the scale of being, and in changing the centre of gravity, as it were, of this life. But there is no reason to believe that anything in death, or beyond it, will so alter the set and direction of his soul as that it will lead him into that possession of God, and being possessed by Him, which he has not here. There are many of us who, if we were to die this instant, would no more have God for ours, or belong to God, than we do now. It is our fault if the circle is broken into so many segments, if the moments of mutual love, communion, and indwelling are so rare and interrupted in our lives. The incompleteness which is due to our earthly condition is nothing as compared with the incompleteness which is due to our own sin.

But this incompleteness is one which may be progressively diminished, and we may be tending moment by moment, and year by year, nearer and nearer, and ever nearer, to the unreachable ideal of the entire possession of, and being possessed by, our God. There is a continual process of redemption of 'God's own possession' going on if a Christian man is true to himself and to that Divine Spirit which is the 'earnest' of the 'inheritance.' Mark that in my text, as it stands in our Bibles, and reads 'until the redemption,' there seems to be merely a pointing onwards to a future epoch, but that, in the more accurate rendering which you will find in the Revised Version, instead of 'until' we have 'unto, ' and that teaches us that the Divine Spirit, which in one aspect is the 'earnest of the inheritance,' is also operating upon men's hearts and minds so as to bring about the gradual completion of the process of redemption.

So, dear brethren, seeing that by our own faults the possession is incomplete, and seeing that in the incompleteness there is given to each of us, if we rightly use it, a mighty power which is working ever towards the completion, it becomes us day by day to draw into our spirits more and more of that divine influence, and to let it work more fully upon the sins and faults which, far more than the body of flesh, or the connection with the world which it brings about, are the reasons for the incompleteness of the possession. We have, if we are wise, the task to discharge of dairy enclosing, so to speak, more and more of the broad land which is all given over to us for our inheritance, but of which only so much as we fence in and cultivate, and make our own, is our own.

The incompleteness is progressively completed, and it is our work as much as God's work to complete it. For though in our text that redemption is conceived of as a divine act, it is not an act in which we are but passive. The air goes into the lungs, and that oxygenates the blood, but the lung has to inflate if the air is to penetrate all its vesicles. And so the Spirit which seals us unto the redemption of the possession has to be received, held, diffused throughout, and utilised by our own effort.

## **II. Now, secondly, notice the certainty of the completion of the incompleteness.**

As I have already said, the clod of earth and the handful of grass, the servant's wages, the soldier's shilling, are all guarantees that the whole of the inheritance or of the pay will be forthcoming in due time. And so there emerges from this consideration of the Divine Spirit as the 'earnest,' the thought that the present experiences of a Christian soul are the surest proofs, and the irrefragable guarantees, of that perfect future. We ask for proofs of a future life. They may be very useful in certain states of mind, and to certain phases of opinion, but as it seems to me, far deeper than the region of logical understanding, and far more conclusive than anything that can be cast into the form of a syllogism, is the experience of a soul which knows that God is its, and that it is God's. 'I think, therefore, I am,' said the philosopher. 'I have God; therefore I shall always be,' says the Christian. Whilst that evidence is available only for himself, it is absolutely conclusive for himself. And the fact that it does spring in the hearts which are purest, because nearest God, is no small matter to be considered by men who may be groping for proofs of a life to come. If the selected moments of the purest devotion here on earth bring with them inevitably the confidence of the unending continuance of that communion, then those who do not believe in that future have to account for the fact as best they may. As for us who do know, though brokenly, and by reason of our own faults very imperfectly, what it is to have God, and be had by Him, we do not need to travel out to dim and doubtful analogies, nor do we even depend entirely upon the fact of a risen Christ ascended to the heavens, and living evermore, but we can say, 'I am God's; God is mine, and death has no power over such a mutual possession.'

The very incompleteness adds strength to the assurance, for the facts of the Christian life are such as to demand, both by its greatness and by its littleness, by its loftiness and by its lapses into lowliness, by the floodtide of devotion that sometimes sweeps rejoicingly over the mud-shoals and by the ebb that sometimes leaves them all black and festering, a future life wherein what was

manifestly meant to be, and capable of being, dominant, supreme, but was hampered and hindered here, shall reach its full development, and where the plant that was dwarfed in this alien soil, transplanted into that higher house, shall blossom and immortal fruits. The new moon has a ragged edge, and each of the protrusions and concavities are the prophecy of the perfect orb which shall ere long fill the night with calm light from its silvery shield. The incompleteness prophesies completion.

And if the incompleteness is so blessed, what will the completeness be? A shilling to a million pounds, Knowledge which is partial and intermittent, like the twilight, as contrasted with the blaze of noonday, Joy like winter sunshine as compared with the warmth and heat of the midday sun at the zenith on the Equator. The 'earnest' of the 'inheritance' is wealth; the inheritance itself shall be unaccountable treasure.

### **III. And so, lastly, a word about the completion of the possession.**

The 'earnest' is always of the same nature as, and a part of the

'inheritance.' Therefore, since the Holy Spirit is the earnest, the conclusion is plain, that the inheritance is nothing less than God Himself. Heaven is to possess God, and to be possessed by Him. That is the highest conception that we can form of that future life. And it is sorely to be lamented that subsidiary conceptions, which are all useful in their subordinate places, have, by popular Christianity, been far too much elevated into being the central blessedness of that future heaven. It is all right that we should cast the things which it is 'impossible for men to utter' into the shape of symbols which may a little relieve the necessary inarticulateness; but golden streets, and crystal pavements, and white robes, and golden palms, and all such representations, are but the dimmest shadows of that which they intend to express, and do often, as is the vice of all symbols, obscure. We can only conceive of a condition of which we have had no experience, by the two ways of symbolism and of negation. We can say, 'There shall be no night there; there shall be no curse there; they need no candle, neither light of the sun; they rest not day nor night; there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.' But all these negations, like their sister symbols, are but surface work, and we have to go deeper than all of them.

But to possess God, and to be possessed by Him, and in either ease fully, perfectly in degree, progressively in measure, eternal in duration, is the Heaven of heaven.

If that is the true conception of the inheritance, then it follows indubitably that such a Heaven is not for everybody. God would fain have us all for His there, as He would fain have each of us here and now, but it may not be. There are creatures which live beneath stones, and if you turn their coverings up, and let light fall on them, it kills them. And there are men who have refused to belong to God here, and refused to claim their portion in Him, and such cannot possess that true Heaven which is God Himself. Then, if its possession is not a mere matter of divine volition, giving a man what he is not capable of receiving, it plainly follows that the preparation must begin now and here by the incomplete possession of which my text is discoursing. And the way of such preparation is plain. The context says: 'In whom, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.' Faith in Jesus Christ, and trust in Him and His work as my forgiveness, my acceptance, my changed nature and heart - is the condition of being 'sealed' with that Spirit whose sealing of us is the condition of our love, our surrender, and mutual indwelling, which our possession of God and being possessed by Him, and are the condition of our future complete possession of the 'inheritance.' We must begin with faith in Christ. Then comes the sealing, then comes the earnest, then comes the growing redemption, and in due time shall come the fulness of the possession. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ' if thou wouldst have the earnest, whilst thou dost tabernacle in tents in the wilderness of Time, and if thou wouldst have the inheritance when thou crossest the flood into the goodly land.

## **THE HOPE OF THE CALLING** **by Alexander Maclaren**

'That ye may know what is the hope of His calling.' - Ephesians 1:18.

A MAN'S prayers for others are a very fair thermometer of his own religious condition. What he asks for them will largely indicate what he thinks best for himself; and how he asks it will show the firmness of his own faith and the fervour of his own feeling. There is nothing colder than the intercession of a cold Christian; and, on the other hand, in no part of the fervid Apostle Paul's writings do his words come more winged and fast, or his spirit glow with greater fervour of affection and holy desire than in his petitions for his friends.

In that great prayer, of which my text forms a part, we have his response to the good news that had reached him of the steadfastness in faith and abundance in love of these Ephesian Christians. As the best expression of his glad love he asks for them the knowledge of three things, of which my text is the first, and the other two are the 'riches of the glory of the inheritance' and 'the

exceeding greatness of God's power.'

Now if we take the 'hope' in my text, as is often done, as meaning the thing hoped for, there seems to be but a shadowy difference between the first and the second of these subjects of the apostolic petition. Whereas, if we take it as meaning, not the object on which the emotion is fixed, but the emotion itself, then all the three stand in a natural gradation and connection. We have, first, the Christian emotion; then the object upon which it is fixed; 'the glory of the inheritance'; then the power by which the latter is brought and the former is realised. We shall consider the second and third of these petitions in following sermons. For the present I confine myself to this first, the Apostle's great desire for Christians who had already made considerable progress in the Christian life, 'that they may know,' by experiencing it, 'what is the hope of His calling.'

### **I. Now the first thought that these words suggest to me is this, that the Christian hope is based upon the facts of Christian experience.**

What does the Apostle mean by naming it 'the hope of his calling'? He means this, that the great act of the divine mercy revealed to us in the Gospel, by which God summons and invites men to Himself, will naturally produce in those who have yielded to it a hope of immortal and perfect life.

Because God has called men, therefore the man who has yielded to the call may legitimately, and must, if he is to do his duty, cherish such a hope. It is clear enough that this is so, inasmuch as, unless there be a heaven of completeness for us who have yielded to the summons and obeyed the invitation of God in His Gospel, His whole procedure is enigmatical and bewildering. The fact of the call is inexplicable; the cost of it is no less so. It was not worth while for God to make the world unless with respect to another which was to follow. It is still less worth His while to redeem the world if the results of that redemption, as they are exhibited here and now, and as they are capable of being exhibited in this present condition of things, are all that are to flow from it. It was not worth Christ's while to die, it was not worth God's while to send His Son, there was no sense or consistency in that great voice that echoes from heaven, calling us to love and serve Him, unless, beyond the jangling contradictions, and imperfect attainments, and foiled aspirations, and fragmentary faith, and broken services of earth, there be a region of completeness where all that was tendency here shall have become effect; and all that was but in germ here, and sorely frostbitten by the ungenial climate, and shrivelled by the foul vapours in the atmosphere, shall blossom and burgeon into eternal life. The Christian life, as it is today, in its attainments and imperfections, is at once the witness of the reality of the power that has produced it, and clamantly calls for a sphere and environment in which that power shall be able to produce the effects which it is capable of producing.

God is 'not a man that He should He, nor the son of man that He should repent.' Men begin grand designs which never get further than the paper that they are drawn on; or they build a porch, and then they are bankrupt, or change their minds, or die, and the palace remains unrealised, and all that pass by mock and say, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' But God's designs are certain of accomplishment. Unless we are to be reduced to a state of utter intellectual bewilderment and confusion, and forgo our belief in His veracity and resources to execute His designs, the design that lies in the calling must needs lead on to the realm of perfectness. If we consider the agent by which it is effected, even the risen Christ; if we consider the cost at which it was accomplished, even the death on the Cross, the mission of His Son, and His assumption of the limitations of an incarnate life; if we consider the manifest potencies of the power that He has brought into operation in the present Christian life; and if we consider, side by side with these, the stark, staring contradictions and as manifest inevitable limitations of the effects of that power, His calling carries in its depths the assurance that what He means shall be done, that Jesus Christ has not died in vain, that He has not ascended to fill a solitary throne, but is the Firstfruits of a great harvest; and that we shall one day be all that it is in the gospel of our salvation to make us, unhindered by the limitations and unthwarted by the antagonisms of this poor human life of ours. Unless there be a heaven in which all desires shall be satisfied, all evils removed, all good perfected, all ragged trees made symmetrical and full-grown, and all souls that love Him radiant with His own perfect image, then the light that seemed a light from heaven is the most delusive of all the marsh-fires of earth, and nothing in the illusions of sense or of men's cunning is so cruel or so tragic as the calling that seemed to be the voice of God, and summoned us to a heaven which was only a dream.

### **II. And so, secondly, notice how this hope of our text is in some sense the very topstone of the Christian Paul has heard, concerning these people in Ephesus, of their faith and love.**

And because he has heard of these, therefore he brings this prayer. These two - the faith which apprehends the manifestation of God in Jesus Christ, and the love which that faith produces in the heart that accepts the revelation of the infinite love - are crowned by, and are imperfect without, and naturally lead on to the brightness of this great hope, Faith - the reliance of the spirit upon the veracity of the revealing God - gives hope its contents; for the Christian hope is not spun out of your own imaginations, nor is it the mere making objective in a future life of the unfulfilled desires of this disappointing present, but it is the recognition by the trusting spirit of the great and starry truths that are flashed upon it by the Word of God. Faith draws back the curtain, and Hope gazes into the supernal abysses. My hope, if it be anything else than the veriest will-o'-the-wisp and delusion, is the answer of my heart to the revealed truth of God.



Similarly the love which flows from faith not only necessarily leads on to the expectation of union being perfected with the object of its warm affection, but also so works upon the heart and character as that the false and seducing loves which draw away, like some sluice upon a river, the current of life from its true channel, are all sanctified and no more hinder hope. Loving, we hope for that which, unless we loved, would not draw desires nor yield foretastes of sweetness which, like perfumed oil, feed the pure flame of hope.

The triad of Christian graces is completed by Hope. Without her fair presence something is wanting to the completeness of her elder sister. The great Campanile at Florence, though it be inlaid with glowing 'marbles, and fair sculptures, and perfect in its beauty, wants the gilded, skyward-pointing pinnacle of its topmost pyramid; and so it stands incomplete. And thus faith and love need for their crowning and completion the topmost grace that looks up to the sky, and is sure of a mansion there.

Brethren, our Christianity is wofully imperfect unless faith and love find their acres, their outstretching completion, in this Christian hope. Do you seek to complete your faith .and love by a living hope full of immortality?

### **III. Thirdly, notice how this hope is an all-important element in the Christian life.**

The Apostle asks for it as the best thing that can befall these Ephesian Christians, as the one thing that they need to make them strong and good and blessed.

There are many other aspects of desire for them Which appear. in other parts of this letter. But here all Christian progress is regarded as being held in solution and included in vigorous hope.

Why is the activity of hope thus important for Christian life? Because it stimulates effort, calms sorrows, takes the fascination out of temptations, supplies a new aim for life and a new measure for the things of time and sense.

If we lived, as we ought to live, in the habitual apprehension of the great future awaiting all real Christians, would it not change the whole aspect of life? The world is very big when it is looked at from any point upon its surface; but suppose it could be looked at from the central sun, how large would it appear then? We can shift our station in like fashion, and then we get the true measure at once of the insignificance and of the greatness of life. This world means nothing worthy, except as an introduction to another. Not that thereby there will follow in any wise man contempt for the present, for the very same reference to the future which dwarfs the greatneses and dwindles the sorrows, and almost extinguishes the dazzling lights of this present, does also lift it to its true significance and importance. It is the vestibule of that future, and that future is conditioned throughout by the results of the few years that we live here. An apprenticeship may be a very poor matter, looked at in itself; and the boy may say. What is the use of my working at all these trivial things? but,since it is apprenticeship, it is worth while to attend to every trifle in its course, for attention to them will affect the standing of the man all his days.

Here and now we are getting ready for the great workshop yonder; learning the trick of the tools, and how to use our fingers and our powers, and, when the schooling is done, we shall be set to nobler work, and receive ample wages for the years here. Because that great 'tomorrow will be as this day' of earthly life, 'and much more abundant,' therefore it is no trifle to work amongst the trifles; and nothing is small which may tell on our condition yonder. The least deflection from the straight line, however acute may be the angle which the divergent lines enclose at the starting, and however small may seem to be the deviation from parallelism, will, if prolonged to infinity, have room between the two for all the stars and the distance between them will be that the one in heaven and the other is in hell. And so it a great thing to live amongst the little things, and life gains its true significance when we dwarf and magnify it by linking it with the world to come.

If we only kept that hope bright before us, how little discomforts and sorrows and troubles would matter! Life would become 'a solemn scorn of ills.' It does not matter much what kind of cabin accommodation we have if we are only going a short voyage; the main thing is to make the port. If we, as Christian people, cherish, as we ought to do, this great hope, then we shall be able to control, and not, to despise but to exalt this fleeting and transient scene, because it is linked inseparably with the life that is to come.

### **IV. Lastly, this hope needs enlightened eyes.**

The Apostle prays that God may give to these Ephesians 'the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,' and then he adds, as the result of that gift, the desire that the Ephesian believers may have 'the eyes of their hearts enlightened.' That is a remarkable expression. It does not mean, as an English reader might suppose it to mean, that the affections are the agents by which this knowledge reaches us; but 'heart' is here used, as it often is in Scripture, as a general expression for the whole inward life, and all that the Apostle means is that, by the gift of the Divine Spirit of wisdom, a man's inner nature may be so touched as to be capable of perceiving and grasping the 'hope of the calling.'

Observe, too, the language, 'that ye may know the hope.' How can you know a hope? How do you know any kind of feeling? By having it. The only way of knowing what is the hope is to hope, and this is only possible by dint of these eyes of the understanding

being enlightened. For our inward nature, as we have it, and as we use it, without the touch of that Divine Spirit, is so engrossed with this present that the far-off blessedness to which my text refers has no chance of entering there. No man can look at something beside him with one eye, and at something half a mile off with the other. You have to focus the eye according to the object; and he who is gazing upon the near is thereby made blind to that which is afar off. If we go crawling along the low levels with our eyes upon the dust, then of course we cannot see the crown above.

We need more than the historical revelation of the light in order to enlighten the inward nature. There is many a man here now who knows all about the immortality that is brought to light by Jesus Christ just as well as the Christian man whose soul is full of the hope of it, and who yet, for all his knowledge, does not know the hope, because he has not felt it. You have to get further than to the acceptance intellectually of the historical facts of a risen and ascended Saviour before there can be, in your heart, any vital hope of immortality. The inward eye must be cleared and strengthened, cross lights must be shut out so that we may direct the single eye of our hearts towards the great objects which alone are worthy of its fixed contemplation. And we cannot do that without a divine help, that Spirit of wisdom which will fill our hearts if we ask for it, which will fix our affections, which will clear our eyesight, which withdraw it from seeing vanity as well as give it reality to see.

But we must observe the conditions. Since this clearness of hope comes not merely from the acceptance as a truth of the fact of Christ's Resurrection and Ascension, but comes through the gift of that Divine Spirit, then to have it you must ask for it. Christian people, do you ask for it? Do you ever pray - I do not mean in words, but in real desire - that God would help you to keep steadily before you that great future to which we are all going so fast? If you do you will get the answer. Seek for that Spirit; use it, and do not resist its touches. Do not fix your gaze on the world when God is trying to draw you to fix it upon Himself. Think more about Jesus Christ, more about God's high calling, live nearer to Him, and try more honestly, more earnestly, more prayerfully, more habitually, even amidst all the troubles and difficulties and trivialities of each day, to cultivate that great faculty of joyful and assured hope.

Surely God did not endue us with the power of hoping that we might fling it all away on trivial, transient things. We are all far too short-sighted; our fault is not that we do not hope, but that we hope for such near things, for such small things, like the old mariners who had no compass nor sextant, and were obliged to creep timidly along the coasts, and steer from headland to headland. But we ought to launch boldly out into mid-ocean, knowing that we have before us that star that cannot guide us amiss. Do not set your hopes on the things that perish, for if you do, hopes fulfilled and hopes disappointed will be equally bitter in your mouths. And you older people who, like myself, are drawing near the end of your days, and have little else left to hope for in this world, do you see to it that your anticipations extend 'above the ruinable skies.' There is an object beyond experience, above imagination, without example, for which the creation wants a comparison, we an apprehension, and the Word of God itself a sufficient revelation. 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be,' God hath called us to His eternal kingdom and glory; let us seek to walk in the light of the 'hope of His calling.'

## GOD'S INHERITANCE IN THE SAINTS

by Alexander Maclaren

'That ye may know what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.' - Ephesians 1:18.

THE misery of Hope is that it so often owes its materials to the strength of our desires or to the activity of our imagination. But when mere wishes or fancies spin the thread, Hope cannot weave a lasting fabric. And so one of the old prophets, in speaking of the delusive hopes of man, says that they are like 'spiders' webs,' and 'shall not become garments.' Paul, then, having been asking for these Ephesian Christians that they might have hopes lofty and worthy, and such as God's summons to them would inspire, passes on to ask that they might have the material out of which they could weave such hope, namely, a sure and clear knowledge of the future blessings. The language in which he describes that future is remarkable - 'the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.' He calls it God's inheritance, not as meaning that God is the Inheritor, but the Giver. He speaks of it as in the saints; meaning that, just as the land of Canaan was distributed amongst tribes and families, and each man got his own little plot, so that broad land is parted out amongst those who are 'partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.'

And so my text suggests to me three points to which I seek to call your attention. First, the inheritance; second, the heirs; and third, the heirs' present knowledge of their future possession.

### I. First, then, note the inheritance.

Now we must discharge from the word some of its ordinary associations. There is no reference to the thought of succession in it, as the mere English reader is accustomed to think - to whom inheritance means possession by the death of another. The idea is simply that of possession. The figure which underlies the word is, of course, that of the ancient partition of the land of Canaan amongst the

tribes, but we must go a great deal deeper than that in order to understand its whole sweep and fulness of meaning.

What is the portion for a soul? God. God is Heaven, and Heaven is God. No interpretation of 'the inheritance,' however it may run into cheap and vulgar sensuous descriptions of a future glory, has come within sight of the meaning of the word, unless it has grasped this as the central thought:

'Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.' Only God can be the portion of a human spirit. And none else can fill the narrowest and the smallest of man's needs.

So, then, if there were realised all the accumulated changes of progress in blessedness, and the withdrawal of all external causes of disquiet and weariness and weeping, still the heart would hunger and be empty of its true possession unless God Himself had flowed into it. It were but a poor advancement and the gain of a loss, if yearnings were made immortal, and the aching vacuity, which haunts every soul that is parted from God, were cursed with immortality. It would be so, if it be not true that the inheritance is nothing less than the fuller possession of God Himself.

And how do men possess God? How do we possess one another, here and now? By precisely the same way, only indefinitely expanded and exalted, do we possess Him here, and shall we possess Him hereafter. Heart to heart is joined by love which is mutual and interpenetrating possession; where 'mine' and 'thine' become blended, like the several portion, of the one ray of white light, in the blessed word 'ours.' Contemplation makes us possessors of God. Assimilation to His character makes us own and have Him. They who love and gaze, and are being changed by still degrees into His likeness, possess Him. This is the central idea of man's future destiny and highest blessedness, a union with God closer and more intimate in degree, but yet essentially the same in kind, as is here possible amidst the shows and vanities and wearinesses of this mortal life. 'His servants shall serve Him, and see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.' Obedience, contemplation, transformation, these are the hands by which we here lay hold on God; and they in the heavens grasp Him just as we here on earth may do. The 'inheritance' is God Himself.

Surely that is in accordance with the whole teaching of Scripture; and is but the expansion of plain words which tell us that we 'are heirs of God.' If that be so, then all the other subsidiary blessings which have been, the sore detriment of Christian anticipation and of Christian life in a hundred ways, elevated into disproportionate importance, fall into their right places, and are more when they are looked upon as secondary than when they are looked upon as primary.

Ah, brethren I neither the sensuous metaphors which, in accommodation to our weakness, Scripture has used to paint that future so that we may, in some measure, comprehend it, nor the translation of these, in so far as they refer to circumstances and externals, are enough for us. It is blessed to know that 'there shall be no night there' - blessed to grasp all those sweet negatives which contradict the miseries of the world, and to think of no sin, no curse, no tears, no sighing nor sorrow, neither any more pain, 'because the former things have passed away.' It is sweet and ennobling to think that, when we are discharged of the load of this cumbrous flesh, we shall be much more ourselves, and able to see where now is but darkness, and to feel where now is but vacancy. It is blessed to think of the recognising of lost and loved ones. But all these blessednesses, heaped together, as it seems to me, would become sickeningly the same if prolonged through eternity, unless we had God for our very own. Eternal is an awful word, even when the noun that goes with it is blessedness. And I know not how even the redeemed could be saved, as the long ages rolled on, from the oppression of monotony, and the feeling, 'I would not live always,' unless God was 'the strength of their hearts, and their portion for ever.' We must rise above everything that merely applies to changes in our own natures and in our relations to the external universe, and to other orders of creatures; and grasp, in the hidden sweetness that lies in the calyx of the gorgeous flower, the possession of God Himself as the rapture of our joy and the heaven of our heaven.

And if that be so, then these accumulated words with which the Apostle, in his fiery, impetuous way, tries to set forth the greatness of what he is speaking about, receive a loftier meaning than they otherwise would have.

'The riches of the glory of His inheritance' - now that word 'riches,' or 'wealth,' is a favourite of Paul's; and in this single letter occurs, if I count rightly, five times. In addition to our text, it is used twice in connection with God's grace, 'the riches of His grace' once in connection with Jesus, 'the unsearchable riches of Christ'; and once in a similar connection to, though with a different application from, our text, 'the riches of His glory.' Always, you see, it is applied to something that is special and properly divine. And here, therefore, it applies, not to the abundance of any creatural good, however exuberant and inexhaustible the store of it may be, but simply and solely to that unwearying energy, that self-feeding and ever-burning and never-decaying light, which is God. Of Him alone it can be said that work does not exhaust, nor Being tend to its own extinction, nor expenditure of resources to their diminution. The guarantee for eternal blessedness is the 'riches' of the eternal God, and so we may be sure that no time can exhaust, nor any expenditure empty, either His storehouse or our wealth.

And again, the 'glory' is not the lustrous light, however dazzling, to our feeble eyes that may be, of any creature that reflects the light of God, but it is the far-flashing and never-dying radiance of His own manifestation of Himself to the hearts and souls of them that love Him. And so the 'inheritance is incorruptible and undefiled, and fadeth not away'; not merely by reason of the communicated will

of God operating upon creatures whom He preserves untarnished by corruption, and ungnawed by decay, but because He Himself is the 'inheritance,' and on Him time hath no power. On His wealth all His creatures may hang for ever; and it shall be as it was in the sweet parable of the miracle of old, the fragments that remain will be more than when the meal began. 'The riches of the glory of His inheritance.'

## **II. Now notice, secondly, the heirs.**

The words of my text receive, perhaps, their best commentary and explanation in those words which the writer of them heard, on the Damascus road, when the voice from heaven spoke to him about men 'obtaining an inheritance among them that are sanctified.' It almost sounds like an echo of that long past, but never-to-be-forgotten voice, when our Apostle writes as he does in our text.

Now what does he mean by 'saints'? Who are these amongst whom the broad acres of that infinite prairie are to be parted out? The word has attracted to itself contemptuous meanings and ascetical meanings, and meanings which really deny the true democracy of Christianity and the equality of all believers in the sight of God. But its scriptural use has none of these narrowing and confusing associations adhering to it, nor does it even directly and at first mean, as we generally take it to mean, pure men, holy in the sense of clean and righteous. But something goes before that phase of meaning, and it is this - a saint is a man separated and set apart for God, as His property. That is the true meaning of the word. It is its meaning as it is applied to the vessels of the Temple, the priests, the cervices, and the altar. It is its meaning, only with the necessary substitution of spirit for body, as it is applied in the New Testament as a designation co-extensive with that of believers.

How does a man belong to God?

We asked a minute or two ago how God belonged to men The answer to the converse question is almost identical. A man belongs to God by the affection of his heart, by the submission of his will, by the reference of his actions to Him; and he who thus belongs to God, in the same act in which he gives himself to God, receives God as his possession. The thing must be reciprocal. 'All mine is Thine'; and God answers, 'And all Mine is thine.' He ever meets our 'O Lord, I yield myself to Thee,' with His 'And My child, I give Myself to thee.' It is so in regard of our earthly loves. It is So in regard of our relations to Him. And that being the ease, purity, which is generally taken by careless readers as being the main idea of sanctity, will follow this self-surrender, which is the basis of all goodness, everywhere and always.

If that be true, and I do not think it can be effectively denied, then the next step is a very plain one, and that is that for the perfect possession of God, which is heaven, the same thing is needed in its perfection which is required for the partial possession of Him that makes the Christian life of earth And just as here we get Him for ours in proportion as we give up ourselves to be His, so yonder the inheritance belongs, and can only belong to, 'the saints.' So, then, one can see that there is nothing arbitrary in this limitation of a possession, which in its very nature cannot go beyond the bounds which are thus marked out for it. If heaven were the vulgar thing that some of you think it, if that future life were desirable simply because you escaped from some external punishment and got all sorts of outward blessings and joys, felicities and advantages, hung round the neck, or pinned upon the breast, as they do to successful fighters, why then, of course, there might be partiality in the distribution of the decorations. But if that possession hinges upon our yielding ourselves to Him, then there is not an arbitrary link in the whole chain. Faith is set forth as the condition of heaven, Because faith is the means of union with Christ, by and from whom alone we draw the motives for self-surrender and the power for sanctity. You cannot have heaven unless you have God. That is step number one. You cannot have God unless you have 'holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.' That is step number two. You cannot have holiness without faith. That is step number three. 'An inheritance among them that are sanctified'; and then there is added, 'by faith which is in Me.' It is dear, too, what a fatal delusion some of us are under who think that we shall, and fancy that we should like to, as we say, 'go to heaven when we die.' Why, heaven is here, round about you, a present heaven in the imitation of God, in the practice of righteousness, in the cultivation of dependence upon Him, in the yielding of yourselves up to Him. Heaven is here, and by your own choice you stop outside of it. There must be a correspondence between environment and nature for blessedness. 'The mind is its own place,' as the great Puritan poet taught us, 'and makes a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.' Fishes die on the shore, and the man that drew them out dies in the water. Gills cannot breathe where lungs are useful, and lungs cannot, where gills come into play. If you have not here and now the holiness which knife you to God, and gives you possession of Him, you would not like 'heaven,' if it were possible to carry you to that place, in so far as it is a place. It is rather strange, if you hope to go to heaven when you die, that you should be very unwilling to spend a little time in it whilst you are alive, and that you should expect blessedness then from that presence of God which brings you no blessedness now.

## **III. Lastly, we have here the heirs' present knowledge of their future blessedness.**

The Apostle asks that these men may know a thing that clearly seems unknowable. It is an impossible petition, we might be ready to say, because it is clear enough that there can be no true knowledge of the conditions and details of that future life. The dark mountains that lie between us and it hide their secret well, and few or no stray beams have reached us. An unborn babe, or a chrysalis in a hole in the ground or in a chink of a tree, might think as wisely about its future condition as we can do about that life

beyond. There can be no knowledge until there is experience.

What, then, does Paul mean by framing such a petition as this? The answer is found in noticing that the knowledge which he is imploring here is a consequence of a previous knowledge. For, in a former verse, he prays that these men may have 'the spirit of wisdom in the knowledge of God'; and when they have got the knowledge of God he thinks that they will have got the knowledge of 'the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.' Now, turn that into other words, and it is just this, that the knowledge of God, which comes by faith and love here, is in kind so identical with the fullest and loftiest riches of the knowledge of Him hereafter, that, if we have the one, we are not without the other. The one is in germ, the other, no doubt, full blown; the one is the twinkling of the rushlight, as it were, the other is the blaze of the sunshine. The two states of being are so correspondent that from the one we draw our clearest knowledge of the other. There are telescopes, in using which you do not look up when you want to see the stars, but down on to a reflecting mirror, and there you see them. Such a reflecting mirror, though it be sometimes muddied and dimmed and always very small, are the experiences of the Christian soul here.

So, dear friends, if we want to know as much as may be known of the Blessedness of heaven, let us seek to possess as much as may be possessed of the knowledge and love of God on earth. Then we shall know the centre, at any rate; and that is light, though the circumference may be very dark. Much will remain obscure. That is of very small consequence to Hope, which does not need information half so much as it needs assurance. Like some flower in the cranny of the rock, it can spread a broad bright blossom on little soil, if only it be firmly rooted.

The path for us all is plain. Come to Jesus Christ as sinful men, and take what He has given, who has given Himself for us. Touched by His love, let us love Him back again, and yield ourselves to Him, and He will give Himself to us. They who can say, 'O Lord! I am Thine,' are sure to hear from heaven, 'I am this' And they who possess, in being possessed by, God Himself, do not need to die in order to go to heaven, but are at least doorkeepers in the house of the Lord now, and stand where they can see into the inner sanctuary which they will one day tread. A life of faith Brings Heaven to us, and thereby gives us the surest and the clearest knowledge of what we shall be, and have, when we are brought to heaven

## **THE MEASURE OF IMMEASURABLE POWER** by Alexander Maclaren

'That ye may know.., what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ.' - Ephesians 1:19, 20.

'THE riches of the glory of the inheritance' will sometimes quench rather than stimulate hope. He can have little depth of religion who has not often felt that the transcendent glory of that promised future sharpens the doubt - 'and can I ever hope to reach it?' Our paths are strewn with battlefields where we were defeated, how should we expect the victor's wreath? And so Paul does not think that he has asked all which his friends in Ephesus need when he has asked that they may know the hope and the inheritance. There is something more wanted, something more even for our knowledge of these, and that is the knowledge of the power which alone can fulfil the hope and bring the inheritance. His language swells and peals and becomes exuberant and noble with his theme. He catches fire, as it were, as he thinks about this power that worketh in us. It is 'exceeding.' Exceeding what? He does not tell us, but other words in this letter, in the other great prayer which it contains, may help us to supply the missing words. He speaks of the 'love of Christ which passeth knowledge,' and of God being 'able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.' The power which is really at work in Christian men to-day is in its nature properly transcendent and immeasurable, and passes thought and desire and knowledge.

And yet it has a measure. 'According to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ.' Is that heaping together of synonyms or all but synonyms, mere tautology? Surely not. Commentators tell us that they can distinguish differences of meaning between the words, in that the first of them is the more active and outward, and the last of them is the more inward. And so they liken them to fruit and branch and root; but we need simply say that the gathering together of words so nearly co-extensive in their meaning is witness to the effort to condense the infinite within the bounds of human tongue, to speak the unspeakable; and that these reiterated expressions, like the blows of the billows that succeed one another on the beach, are hints of the force of the infinite ocean that lies behind.

And then the Apostle, when he has once come in sight of his risen Lord, as is his wont, is swept away by the ardour of his faith and the clearness of his vision, and breaks from his purpose in order to dilate on the glories of his King. We do not need to follow him into that. I limit myself now to the words which I have read as my text, with only such reference to the magnificent passage which succeeds as may be necessary for the exposition of this.

## **I. So, then, I ask you to look, first, at the measure and example of the immeasurable power that works in Christian men.**

'According to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ' - the Resurrection, the Ascension, the session at the right hand of God, the rule over all creatures, and the exaltation above all things on earth or in the heavens - these are the facts which the Apostle brings before us as the pattern-works, the chefs-d'oeuvre of the power that is operating in all Christians. The present glories of the ascended Christ are glories possessed by a Man, and, that being so, they are available as evidences and measures of the power which works in believing souls. In them we see the possibilities of humanity, the ideal for man which God had when He created and breathed His blessing upon him. It is one of ourselves who has strength enough to bear the burden of the glory, one of ourselves who can stand within the blaze of encircling and indwelling Divinity and be unconsumed. The possibilities of human nature are manifest there. If we want to know what the Divine Power can make of us, let us turn to look with the eye of faith upon what it has made of Jesus Christ.

But such a thought, glorious as it is, still leaves room for doubt as to my personal attainment of such an ideal. Possibility is much, but we need solid certainty. And we find it in the truth that the bond between Christ and those who truly love and trust Him is such as that the possibility must become a reality and be consolidated into a certainty. The Vine and its branches, their Head and the members, the Christ and His Church, are knit together by such closeness of union as that wheresoever and whatsoever the one is, there and that must the others also be. Therefore, when doubts and fears, and consciousness of our own weakness, creep across us, and all our hopes are dimmed, as some star in the heavens is, when a light mist floats between us and it, let us turn away to Him our brother, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and think that He, in His calm exaltation and regal authority and infinite blessedness, is not only the pattern of what humanity may be, but the pledge of what His Church must be. 'Where I am, there shall also My servant be.' 'The glory that Thou gavest Me I have given them.'

Nor is that all. Not only a possibility and a certainty for the future are for us the measure of the power that worketh in us, but as this same letter teaches us, we have, as Christians, a present scale by which we may estimate the greatness of the power. For in the next chapter, after that glorious burst as to the dignity of his Lord, which we have not the heart to call a digression, the Apostle, recurring to the theme of my text, goes on to say, 'And you hath He quickened,' and then, catching it up again a verse or two afterwards, he reiterates, clause by clause, what had been done on Jesus as having been done on us Christians. If that Divine Spirit raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, it is as true that the same power hath 'raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' And so not only the far-off, though real and brilliant, and eye and heart-filling glories of the ascended Christ give us the measure of the power, but also the limited experience of the present Christian life, the fact of the resurrection from the true death, the death of sin, the fact of union with Jesus Christ so real and close as that they who truly experience it do live, as far as the roots of their lives and the scope and the aim of them are concerned, 'in the heavens,' and 'sit with Him in heavenly places' - these things afford us the measure of the power that worketh in us.

Then, because a Man is King of kings and Lord of lords; and because He who is our Life 'is exalted high above all principalities and powers'; and because from His throne He has quickened us from the death of sin, and has drawn us so near to Himself that if we are His we truly live beside Him, even whilst we stumble here in the darkness, we may know the exceeding greatness of His power, according to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.

## **II. Secondly, notice the knowledge of the unknowable power.**

We have already come across the same apparent paradox, covering a deep truth, in the former sections of this series of petitions. I need only remind you, in reference to this matter, that the knowledge which is here in question is not the intellectual perception of a fact as revealed in Scripture, but is that knowledge to which alone the New Testament gives the noble name, being knowledge verified by inward experience, and the result of one's own personal acquaintance with its object.

How do we know a power? By thrilling beneath its force. How are we to know the greatness of the power but because it comes surging and rejoicing into our aching emptiness, and lifts us buoyant above our temptations and weakness? Paul was not asking for these people theological conceptions. He was asking that their spirits might be so saturated with and immersed in that great ocean of force that pours from God as that they should never, henceforth, be able to doubt the greatness of that power which wrought in them. The knowledge that comes from experience is the knowledge that we all ought to seek. It is not merely to be desired that we should have right and just conceptions, but that we should have the vital knowledge which is, and which comes from, life eternal.

And that power, which thus we may all know by feeling it working upon ourselves, though it be immeasurable, has its measure; though it be, in its depth and fulness, unknowable and inexhaustible, may yet be really and truly known. You do not need a thunderstorm to experience the electric shock; a Battery that you can carry in your pocket will do that for you. You do not need to have traversed all the length and breadth and depth and height of some newly-discovered country to be sure of its existence, and to have a real, though it may be a vague, conception of the magnitude of its shores. And so, really, though boundedly, we have the knowledge of God, and can rely upon it as valid, though partial; and similarly, by experience we have such a certified acquaintance

with Him and His power as needs no enlargement to be trusted, and to become the source of blessings untold. We may see but a strip of the sky through the narrow chinks of our prison windows, and many a grating may further intercept the view, and much dust that might be cleared away may dim the glass, but yet it is the sky that we see, and we can think of the great horizon circling round and round, and of the infinite depths above there, which neither eye nor thought can travel unwearied. Though all that we see be but an inch in breadth and a foot or two in height, yet we do see. We know the unknowable power that passeth knowledge.

And let me remind you of how large importance this knowledge of and constant reference to the measureless power manifested in Christ is for us. I believe there can be no vigorous, happy Christian life without it. It is our only refuge from pessimism and despair for the world. The old psalm said,

'Thou hast crowned Him with glory and honour, and hast given Him dominion over the works of Thy hands,' and hundreds of years afterwards the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews commented on it thus, 'We see not yet all things put under Him.' Was the old vision a dream, was it never intended to be fulfilled? Apparently so, if we take the history of the past into account, and the centuries that have passed since have done nothing to make it more probable, apart from Jesus Christ, that man will rise to the height which the Psalmist dreamed of. When we look at the exploded Utopias that fill the past; when we think of the strange and apparently fatal necessity by which evil is developed from every stage of what men call progress, and how improvement is perverted, almost as soon as effected, into another fortress of weakness and misery; when we look on the world as it is today, I know not whence a man is to draw bright hopes, or what is to deliver him from pessimism as his last word about himself and his fellows, except the 'working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ.' 'We see not yet all things put under Him' be it so, 'but we see Jesus,' and, looking to Him, hope is possible, reasonable, and imperative.

The same knowledge is our refuge from our own consciousness of weakness. We look up, as a climber may do in some Alpine ravine, upon the smooth gleaming walls of the cliff that rises above us. It is marble, it is fair, there are lovely lands on the summit, but nothing that has not wings can get there.

We try, but slip backwards almost as much as we rise. What is to be done? Are we to sit down at the foot of the cliff, and say, 'We cannot climb, let us be content with the luscious herbage and sheltered ease below?' Yes! That is what we are tempted to say. But look! a mighty hand reaches over, an arm is stretched down, the hand grasps us, and lifts us, and sets us there.

'No man hath ascended up into heaven save He that came down from heaven,' and having returned thither stoops thence, and will lift us to Himself. I am a poor, weak creature. Yes! I am all full of sin and corruption. Yes! I am ashamed of myself every day. Yes! I am too heavy to climb, and have no wings to fly, and am bound here by chains manifold. Yes! But we know the exceeding greatness of the power, and we triumph in Him.

That knowledge should shame us into contrition, when we think of such force at our disposal, and such poor results. That knowledge should widen our conceptions, enlarge our desires, breathe a brave confidence into our hopes, should teach us to expect great things of God, and to be intolerant of present attainments whilst anything remains unattained. And it should stimulate our vigorous effort, for no man will long seek to be better, if he is convinced that the effort is hopeless.

Learn to realise the exceeding greatness of the power that will clothe your weakness. 'Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, for that He is strong in might, not one faileth.' That is wonderful, but here is a far nobler operation of the divine power. It is great to 'preserve the ancient heavens' fresh and strong by His might, but it is greater to come down to my weakness, to 'give power to the faint,' and 'increase strength to them that have no might.' And that is what He will do with us.

### **III. Lastly, notice the conditions for the operations of the power.**

'To usward who believe,' says Paul. He has been talking to these Ephesians, and saying 'ye,' but now, by that 'us,' he places himself beside them, identifies himself with them, and declares that all his gifts and strength come to him on precisely the same conditions on which theirs do to them; and that he, like them, is a waiter upon that grace which God bestows on them that trust Him.

'To usward who believe.' Once more we are back at the old truth which we can never make too emphatic and plain, that the one condition of the weakest among us being strong with the strength of the Lord is simple trust in Him, verified, of course, by continuance and by effort.

How did the water go into the Ship Canal at Eastham last week? First of all they cut a trench, and then they severed the little strip of land between the hole and the sea, and the sea did the rest. The wider and deeper the opening that we make in our natures by our simple trust in God, the fuller will be the rejoicing flood that pours into us. There is an old story about a Christian father, who, having been torturing himself with theological speculations about the nature of the Trinity, fell asleep and dreamed that he was emptying the ocean with a thimble! Well, you cannot empty it with a thimble, but you can go to it with one, and, if you have only a thimble in your hand, you will only bring away a thimbleful. The measure of your faith is the measure of God's power given to you.

There are two measures of the immeasurable power - the one is that infinite limit, of 'the power which He wrought in Christ,' and the other the practical limit. The working measure of our spiritual life is our faith. In plain English, we can have as much of God as we want. We do have as much as we want. And if, in touch with the power that can shatter a universe, we only get a little thrill that is scarcely perceptible to ourselves, and all unnoticed by others, whose fault is that? If, coming to the fountain that laughs at drought, and can fill a universe with its waters, we scarcely bear away a straitened drop or two, that barely refreshes our parched lips, and does nothing to stimulate the growth of the plants of holiness in our gardens, whose fault is that? The practical measure of the power is for us the measure of our belief and desire. And if we only go to Him, as I pray we all may, and continue there, and ask from Him strength, according to the riches that are treasured in Jesus Christ, we shall get the old answer, 'According to your faith be it unto you.'