



Scriptures and Doctrine :: MANÂ'S TRUE TREASURE IN GOD

MANÂ'S TRUE TREASURE IN GOD - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/3/28 20:56

MANÂ'S TRUE TREASURE IN GOD

Alexander Maclaren Expositions of Holy Scripture

Â‘The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup; Thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.Â’—PSALM xvi. 5, 6.

We read, in the law which created the priesthood in Israel, that Â‘the Lord spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them. I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of IsraelÂ’ (Numbers xvii. 20). Now there is an evident allusion to that remarkable provision in this text. The Psalmist feels that in the deepest sense he has no possession amongst the men who have only possessions upon earth, but that God is the treasure which he grasps in a rapture of devotion and self-abandonment. The priestÂ’s duty is his choice. He will Â‘walk by faith and not by sight.Â’

Are not all Christians priests? and is not the very essence and innermost secret of the religious life thisÂ—that the heart turns away from earthly things and deliberately accepts God as its supreme good, and its only portion? These first words of my text contain the essence of all true religion.

The connection between the first clause and the others is closer than many readers perceive. The Â‘lotÂ’ which Â‘Thou maintainest,Â’ the Â‘pleasant places,Â’ the Â‘goodly heritage,Â’ all carry on the metaphor, and all refer to God as Himself the portion of the heart that chooses and trusts Him. Â‘Thou maintainest my lotÂ’—He who is our inheritance also guards our inheritance, and whosoever has taken God for his possession has a possession as sure as God can make it. Â‘The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritageÂ’—the heritage that is goodly is God Himself. When a man chooses God for his portion, then, and then only, is he satisfied—Â‘satisfied with favour, and full of the goodness of the Lord.Â’ Let me try to expand and enforce these thoughts, with the hope that we may catch something of their fervour and their glow.

I. The first thought, then, that comes out of the words before us is this:

all true religion has its very heart in deliberately choosing God as my supreme good.

Â‘The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup.Â’ The two words which are translated in our version Â‘portionÂ’ and Â‘inheritanceÂ’ are substantially synonymous. The latter of them is used continually in reference to the share of each individual, or family, or tribe in the partition of the land of Canaan. There is a distinct allusion, therefore, to that partition in the language of our text; and the two expressions, part or Â‘portion,Â’ and Â‘inheritance,Â’ are substantially identical, and really mean just the same as if the single expression had stood—Â‘The Lord is my Portion.Â’

I may just notice in passing that these words are evidently alluded to in the New Testament, in the Epistle to the Colossians, where Paul speaks of God Â‘having made us meet for our portion of the inheritance of the saints in light.Â’

And then the Â‘portion of my cupÂ’ is a somewhat strange expression. It is found in one of the other Psalms, with the meaning Â‘fortune,Â’ or Â‘destiny,Â’ or Â‘sum of circumstances which make up a manÂ’s life.Â’ There may be, of course, an allusion to the metaphor of a feast here, and God may be set forth as Â‘the portion of my cup,Â’ in the sense of being the refreshment and sustenance of a manÂ’s soul. But I should rather be disposed to consider that there is merely a prolongation of the earlier metaphor, and that the same thought as is contained in the figure of the Â‘inheritanceÂ’ is expressed here (as in common conversation it is often expressed) by the word Â‘cup,Â’ namely, Â‘that which makes up a manÂ’s portion in this life.Â’ It is used with such a meaning in the well-known words, Â‘My cup runneth over,Â’ and in another shape in Â‘The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?Â’ It is the sum of circumstances which make up a manÂ’s Â‘fortune.Â’ So the double metaphor presents the one thought of God as the true possession of the devout soul.

Now, how do we possess God? We possess things in one fashion and persons in another. The lowest and most imperfect form of possession is that by which a man simply keeps other people off material good, and asserts the right of dispos-

al of it as he thinks proper. A blind man may have the finest picture that ever was painted; he may call it his, that is to say, nobody else can sell it, but what good is it to him? A lunatic may own a library as big as the Bodleian, but what use is it to him? Does the man who collects the rents of a mountain-side, or the poet or painter to whom its cliffs and heather speak far-reaching thoughts, most truly possess it? The highest form of possession, even of things, is when they minister to our thought, to our emotion, to our moral and intellectual growth.

We possess even them really, according as we know them and hold communion with them. But when we get up into the region of persons, we possess them in the measure in which we understand them, and sympathise with them, and love them.

Knowledge, intercourse, sympathy, affection—these are the ways by which men can possess men, and spirits, spirits. A disciple who gets the thoughts of a great teacher into his mind, and has his whole being saturated by them, may be said to have made the teacher his own. A friend or a lover owns the heart that he or she loves, and which loves back again; and not otherwise do we possess God.

Such ownership must be, from its very nature, reciprocal. There must be the two sides to it. And so we read in the Bible, with equal frequency:

the Lord is the inheritance of His people, and His people are the inheritance of the Lord.

He possesses me, and I possess Him—with reverence be it spoken—by the very same tenure; for whoso loves God has Him, and whom He loves He owns. There is deep and blessed mystery involved in this wonderful prerogative, that the loving, believing heart has God for its possession and indwelling Guest; and people are apt to brush such thoughts aside as mystical. But, like all true Christian mysticism, it is intensely practical.

We have God for ours, first, in the measure in which our minds are actively occupied with thoughts of Him. We have no merely mystical or emotional possession of God to preach. There is a real, adequate knowledge of Him in Jesus Christ. We know God, His character, His heart, His relations to us, His thoughts of good concerning us, sufficiently for all intellectual and for all practical purposes.

I wish to ask you a plain question: Do you ever think about Him? There is only one way of getting God for yours, and that is by bringing Him into your life by frequent meditation upon His sweetness, and upon the truths that you know about Him. There is no other way by which a spirit can possess a spirit, that is not cognisable by sense, except only by the way of thinking about him, to begin with. All else follows that. That is how you hold your dear ones when they go to the other side of the world. That is how you hold God, who dwells on the other side of the stars. There is no way to 'have' Him, but through the understanding accepting Him, and keeping firm hold of Him.

Men and women that from Monday morning to Saturday night never think of His name—how do they possess God? And professing Christians that never remember Him all the day long—what absurd hypocrisy it is for them to say that God is theirs!

Yours, and never in your mind! When your husband, or your wife, or your child, goes away from home for a week, do you forget them as utterly as you forget God? Do you have them in any sense if they never dwell in the 'study of your imagination,' and never fill your thoughts with sweetness and with light?

And so again when the heart turns to Him, and when all the faculties of our being, will, hope, and imagination, and all our affections and all our practical powers, when they all touch Him, each in its proper fashion, then and then only can we in any reasonable and true sense be said to possess God.

Thought, communion, sympathy, affection, moral likeness, practical obedience, these are the way—and not by mystical raptures only—by which, in simple prose fact, it is possible for the finite to grasp the infinite, and for a man to be the owner of God.

Now there is another consideration very necessary to be remembered, and that is that this possession of God involves, and is possible only by, a deliberate act of renunciation. The Levite's example, that is glanced at in my text, is always our law.

You must have no part or inheritance amongst the sons of earth if God is to be your inheritance.

Or, to put it into plain words, there must be a giving up of the material and the created if there is to be a possession of the divine and the heavenly.

There cannot be two supreme, any more than there can be two pole-stars, one in the north and the other in the south, to both of which a man can be steering. You cannot stand with
Â‘One foot on land, and one on sea,
To one thing constant never.Â’

If you are to have God as your supreme good, you must empty your heart of earth and worldly things, or your possession of Him will be all words, and imagination, and hypocrisy.

Brethren! I wish to bring that message to your consciences to-day.

And what is this renunciation? There must be, first of all, a fixed, deliberate, intelligent conviction lying at the foundation of my life that God is best, and that He and He only is my true delight and desire.

Then there must be built upon that intelligent conviction that God is best, the deliberate turning away of the heart from these material treasures.

Then there must be the willingness to abandon the outward possession of them, if they come in between us and Him.

Just as travellers in old days, that went out looking for treasures in the western hemisphere, were glad to empty their ships of their less precious cargo in order to load them with gold, you must get rid of the trifles, and fling these away if ever they so take up your heart that God has no room there.

Or rather, perhaps, if the love of God in any real measure, howsoever imperfectly, once gets into a manÂ’s soul, it will work there to expel and edge out the love and regard for earthly things.

Just as when the chemist collects oxygen in a vessel filled with water, as it passes into the jar it drives out the water before it; the love of God, if it come into a manÂ’s heart in any real sense, in the measure in which it comes, will deliver him from the love of the world. But between the two there is warfare so internecine and endless that they cannot co-exist:

and here, to-day, it is as true as ever it was that if you want to have God for your portion and your inheritance you must be content to have no inheritance amongst your brethren, nor part amongst the sons of earth.

Men and women! are you ready for that renunciation?

Are you prepared to say, Â‘I know that the sweetness of Thy presence is the truest sweetness that I can taste; and lo! I give up all besides and my own selfÂ’?

Â‘O God of good, the unfathomed Sea!
Who would not yield himself to Thee?Â’

And remember, that nothing less than these is ChristianityÂ—the conviction that the world is second and not first; that God is best, love is best, truth is best, knowledge of Him is best, likeness to Him is best, the willingness to surrender all if it come in contest with His supreme sweetness.

He that turns his back upon earth by reason of the drawing power of the glory that excelleth, is a Christian.

The Christianity that only trusts to Christ for deliverance from the punishment of sin, and so makes religion a kind of fire insurance, is a very poor affair. We need the lesson pealed into our ears as much as any generation has ever done, Â‘Ye cannot serve God and mammon.Â’

A manÂ’s real working religion consists in his loving God most and counting His love the sweetest of all things.

Continued:

Re: MANĀ'S TRUE TREASURE IN GOD - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/3/29 9:27

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II. Now let me turn to the next point that is here, viz. that this possession is as sure as God can make it. Ā'Thou maintainest my lot.Ā' Thou art Thyself both my heritage and the guardian of my heritage. He that possesses God, says the text, by implication, is lifted above all fear and chance of change.

The land, the partition of which amongst the tribes lies at the bottom of the allusive metaphor of my text, was given to them under the sanction of a supernatural defence; and the law of their continuance in it was that they should trust and serve the unseen King.

It was He, according to the theocratic theory of the Old Testament, and not chariots and horses, their own arm and their own sword, that kept them safe, though the enemies on the north and the enemies on the south were big enough to swallow up the little kingdom at a mouthful.

And so, says the Psalmist allusively, in a similar manner, the Divine Power surrounds the man who chooses God for his heritage, and nothing shall take that heritage from him.

The lower forms of possession, by which men are called the owners of material goods, are imperfect, because they are all precarious and temporary.

Nothing really belongs to a man if it can be taken from him.

What we may lose we can scarcely be said to have. They are mine, they were yours, they will be somebody else's tomorrow. Whilst we have them we do not have them in any deep sense; we cannot retain them, they are not really ours at all.

The only thing that is worth calling mine is something that so passes into and saturates the very substance of my soul that, like a piece of cloth dyed in the grain, as long as two threads hold together the tint will be there.

That is how God gives us Himself, and nothing can take Him out of a man's soul. He, in the sweetness of His grace, bestows Himself upon man, and guards His own gift in the heart, which is Himself.

He who dwells in God and God in him lives as in the inmost keep and citadel. The noise of battle may roar around the walls, but deep silence and peace are within. The storm may rage upon the coasts, but he who has God for his portion dwells in a quiet inland valley where tempests never come.

No outer changes can touch our possession of God.

They belong to another region altogether. Other goods may go, but this is held by a different tenure.

The life of a Christian is lived in two regions: in the one his life has its roots, and its branches extend to the other. In the one there may be whirling storms and branches may toss and snap, whilst in the other, to which the roots go down, may be peace. Root yourselves in God, making Him your truest treasure, and nothing can rob you of your wealth.

We here in this commercial community see many examples of great fortunes and great businesses melting away like yesterday's snow. And surely the certain alternations of 'booms' and bad times might preach to some of you this lesson: Set not your hearts on that which can pass, but make your treasure that which no man can take from you.

Then, too, there is the other thought. God will help us so that no temptations shall have power to make us rob ourselves of our treasure. None can take it from us but ourselves, but we are so weak and surrounded by temptations so strong that we need Him to aid us if we are not to be beguiled by our own treacherous hearts into parting with our highest good. A handful of feeble Jews were nothing against the gigantic might of Assyria, or against the compacted strength of civilised Egypt; but there they stood, on their rocky mountains, defended, not by their own strength, but by the might of a present God.

And so, unfit to cope with the temptations round us as we are, if we cast ourselves upon His power and make Him our supreme delight, nothing shall be able to rob us of that possession and that sweetness.

And there is just one last point that I would refer to here on this matter of our stable possession of God.

It is very beautiful to observe that this psalm, which, in the language of my text, rises to the very height of spiritual and, in a good sense, mystical devotion, recognising God as the One Good for souls, is also one of the psalms which has the clearest utterance of the faith in immortality.

Just after the words of my text we read these others, in which the Old Testament confidence in a life beyond the grave reaches its very climax:

‘Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine holy one to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life; in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.’

That connection teaches us that the measure in which a man feels his true possession of God here and now, is the measure in which his faith rises triumphant over the darkness of the grave, and grasps, with unfaltering confidence, the conviction of an immortal life.

The more we know that God is our portion and our treasure, the more sure, and calmly sure, we shall be that a thing like death cannot touch a thing like that, that the mere physical fact is far too small and insignificant a fact to have any power in such a region as that; that death can no more affect a man's relation to God, whom he has learned to love and trust, than you can cut thought or feeling with a knife.

The two belong to two different regions. Thus we have here the Old Testament faith in immortality shaping itself out of the Old Testament enjoyment of communion with God, with a present God. And you will find the very same process of thought in that seventy-third psalm, which stands in some respects side by side with this one as attaining the height of mystical devotion, joined with a very clear utterance of the faith in immortality:

‘Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee! Thou wilt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.’

So Death himself cannot touch the heritage of the man whose heritage is the Lord. And his ministry is not to rob us of our treasures as he robs men of all treasures besides (for ‘their glory shall not descend after them’), but to give us instead of the ‘earnest of the inheritance’—the bit of turf by which we take possession of the estate—the broad land in all the amplitude of its sweep, into our perpetual possession.

‘Thou maintainest my lot.’ Neither death nor life ‘shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.’

Continued:

Re: MANÁ'S TRUE TREASURE IN GOD - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/3/30 17:25

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III. And then the last thought here is that he who thus elects to find his treasure and delight in God is satisfied with his choice. ‘The lines’—the measuring-cord by which the estate was parted off and determined—are fallen in pleasant places; yea!—not as our Bible has it, merely ‘I have a goodly heritage,’ putting emphasis on the fact of possession, but ‘the heritage is goodly to me,’ putting emphasis on the fact of subjective satisfaction with it.

I have no time to dwell upon the thoughts that spring from these words. Take them in the barest outline.

No man that makes the worse choice of earth instead of God, ever, in the retrospect, said: ‘I have a goodly heritage.’ One of the later Roman Emperors, who was among the best of them, said, when he was dying:

‘I have been everything, and it profits me nothing.’

No creature can satisfy your whole nature. Portions of it may be fed with their appropriate satisfaction, but as long as we feed on the things of earth there will always be part of our being like an unfed tiger in a menagerie, growling for its prey, whilst its fellows are satisfied for the moment.

You can no more give your heart rest and blessedness by pitching worldly things into it, than they could fill up Chat Mos

s, when they made the first Liverpool and Manchester Railway, by throwing in cartloads of earth. The bog swallowed them and was none the nearer being filled.

No man who takes the world for his portion ever said, 'The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places.' For the make of your soul as plainly cries out 'God!' as a fish's fins declare that the sea is its element, or a bird's wings mark it out as meant to soar.

Man and God fit each other like the two halves of a tally. You will never get rest nor satisfaction, and you will never be able to look at the past with thankfulness, nor at the present with repose, nor into the future with hope, unless you can say

'God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.'

But oh! if you do, then you have a goodly heritage, a heritage of still satisfaction, a heritage which suits, and gratifies, and expands all the powers of a man's nature, and makes him ever capable of larger and larger possession of a God who ever gives more than we can receive, that the overplus may draw us to further desire, and the further desire may more fully be satisfied.

The one true, pure, abiding joy is to hold fellowship with God and to live in His love. The secret of all our unrest is the going out of our desires after earthly things. They fly forth from our hearts like Noah's raven, and nowhere amid all the weltering flood can find a resting-place. The secret of satisfied repose is to set our affections thoroughly on God. Then our wearied hearts, like Noah's dove returning to its rest, will fold their wings and nestle fast by the throne of God.

'All the happiness of this life,' said William Law, 'is but trying to quench thirst out of golden empty cups.'

But if we will take the Lord for 'the portion of our cup,' we shall never thirst.

Let me beseech you to choose God in Christ for your supreme good and highest portion; and having chosen, to cleave to your choice. So shall you enter on possession of good that truly shall be yours, even 'that good part, which shall not be taken away from' you.

And, lastly, remember that if you would have God, you must take Christ. He is the true Joshua, who puts us in possession of the inheritance. He brings God to you—to your knowledge, to your love, to your will. He brings you to God, making it possible for your poor sinful souls to enter His presence by His blood; and for your spirits to possess that divine Guest. 'He that hath the Son, hath the Father'; and if you trust your souls to Him who died for you, and cling to Him as your delight and your joy, you will find that both the Father and the Son come to you and make their home in you. Through Christ the Son you will receive power to become sons of God, and 'if children, then heirs, heirs of God,' because 'joint heirs with Christ.'

Re: MANÂ'S TRUE TREASURE IN GOD - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/5/2 8:49

Hi all,

Was rereading this article and thought it worthy for another look. So much truth here that can strengthen your life in Him. Well worth the read.

In His Love
pastorfrin

Re: MANÂ'S TRUE TREASURE IN GOD - posted by Ruach34 (), on: 2008/5/7 9:22

Quote:
-----Are not all Christians priests? and is not the very essence and innermost secret of the religious life this—that the heart turns away from earthly things and deliberately accepts God as its supreme good, and its only portion? These first words of my text contain the essence of all true religion.

My 'appetite' is whetted by these words...I have not read this entirely but will, and wanted to say thank you for posting this, dear friend.

Your posts often get at the root of the matter and do not banter on the fringes. It is amazing how clear true words echo in the soul of the saved. It is as if the man of God is calling out from the center (heart) of God Himself. That man is not on the outside looking in, so to speak, or concerned with all the extra. He is concerned with the crux of the matter, the very heart of God; the issue itself.