

Windows of Witness (Alexander Maclaren)

“For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” Acts 4:20

As a preacher I am often asked which writers, in addition to Biblical text, I glean from the most. The truth is that the list is lengthy. There are certain men of history who are well known and often quoted such as Charles Spurgeon, John Gill, Matthew Henry, JC Ryle, AW Tozer and AW Pink. There are also men of our generation, including Dr. Albert Mohler (President of Southern Seminary), John MacArthur, John Piper, R.C. Sproul, and others, of whose labor I am grateful. Countless others, not as widely circulated, have had a tremendous impact on my walk with God. (Horatius and Andrew Bonar, Watchman Nee, Robert Murray McCheyne, Samuel Chadwick, and Andrew Murray just to name a few.) Although he is not often found in the daily diet of social media feeds, the writings of Alexander Maclaren, “The Prince of Bible Expositors”, have warmly ministered to my heart and I hold him in high esteem.

Alexander Maclaren (1826-1910) was born in Glasgow, Scotland and became one of the greatest expositors of scripture in the 19th century. Maclaren approached his time of study as a matter of utmost importance and priority. So much so, that upon entering his study each morning, Maclaren wore his work boots as a reminder that he was entering his study as a “workman”, 2 Timothy 2:15. In his work, *The Expositions of Holy Scripture*, it is made clear that these are the words from the heart of a man who has seen the heart of God through His Word.

The highlight and summary that I wish for us to garner from Maclaren’s life is found in his own words to the Baptist World Congress in 1905. In 1905, much like today, many had their focus completely on the work and PUBLIC ministry of living the Christian life. Maclaren, however noted that, “The first, second, and third requisite (requirement) for our work is personal godliness; without that...I am harsh and discordant as sounding brass, monstrous and unmusical as a tinkling cymbal.” Maclaren not only declared, but also lived out his belief that his work was secondary and that “Power for holiness and character is first.”

Maclaren looked to God’s Word, studied God’s Word, leaned upon God’s Word - not as a book for sermons, but as the source of his spiritual life, personal holiness, and power for his daily walk with God. He then preached out of what God had poured into his own heart during his personal study and devotion to God. We are surrounded by a religious world today that places an unbalanced emphasis on the public display of ministry. As James Stewart said so well in *Heavens Throne Gift*, “It is one thing to work for God; it is another thing to have God work through us.”

I pray that, like Maclaren, we will be a people of the Word, and that we will become so saturated with it’s blessed truths that others may be able to drink from our well.

~ Pastor Tim Hodge