

Alexander MacLaren

- 1826-1910), Baptist preacher and expositor

Maclaren was born in Glasgow on February 11, 1826, and died in Manchester on May 5, 1910. He had been for almost sixty-five years a minister, entirely devoted to his calling. He lived more than almost any of the great preachers of his time between his study, his pulpit, his pen.

He subdued action to thought, thought to utterance and utterance to the Gospel. His life was his ministry; his ministry was his life. In 1842 he was enrolled as a candidate for the Baptist ministry at Stepney College, London. He was tall, shy, silent and looked no older than his sixteen years. But his vocation, as he himself (a consistent Calvinist) might have said, was divinely decreed. "I cannot ever recall any hesitation as to being a minister," he said. "It just had to be."

In the College he was thoroughly grounded in Greek and Hebrew. He was taught to study the Bible in the original and so the foundation was laid for his distinctive work as an expositor and for the biblical content of his preaching. Before Maclaren had finished his course of study he was invited to Portland Chapel in Southampton for three months; those three months became twelve years. He began his ministry there on June 28, 1846. His name and fame grew.

His ministry fell into a quiet routine for which he was always grateful: two sermons on Sunday, a Monday prayer meeting and a Thursday service and lecture. His parishioners thought his sermons to them were the best he ever preached. In April 1858 he was called to be minister at Union Chapel in Manchester. No ministry could have been happier. The church prospered and a new building had to be erected to seat 1,500; every sitting was taken. His renown as preacher spread throughout the English-speaking world. His pulpit became his throne. He was twice elected President of the Baptist Union. He resigned as pastor in 1905 after a ministry of forty-five years.

Maclaren's religious life was hid with Christ in God. He walked with God day by day. He loved Jesus Christ with a reverent, holy love and lived to make Him known. In his farewell sermon at Union he said: "To efface oneself is one of a preacher's first duties."