**VOLUME 3; CHAPTER 09 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE CITIES OF MEN AND THE CITY OF GOD by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising shame, and bath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

*Hebrews 12:1,2*

THERE IS AN IRRESISTIBLE CHARM ABOUT THIS PASSAGE OF Scripture. The suggestions that lie within its compass appeal to us. The mystery of the cloud of witnesses; the strenuous reality of the description of the present experience of the saints under the figure of a race; and, finally, the lonely splendor of the Lord of Faith. It seems a ruthless thing to dissect and analyze a passage so full of beauty as this passage undoubtedly is; and yet this is in part what I propose to do, and that for a very simple reason - that it seems to me that a partial interpretation has robbed it of much of its spacious and far-reaching value. A very common and popular interpretation of the passage is that the writer of the letter is here describing the individual race of a Christian soul through this world toward the mystic and mysterious heaven that lies beyond it; that as the runner presses along his way he is watched in his running by great companies of those who have gone before; and that, in order to win his individual crowning, he is urged to lay aside weights and the sin that doth so easily beset. That interpretation I have referred to as being partial; I am inclined to use a much stronger word, and to say that it is wholly and absolutely inaccurate. I know something of the strenuousness of the individual race. I believe with all my soul in the ultimate glory of the heaven that lies beyond our vision. I am perfectly certain that it is necessary, in order to run that individual race, that there should be the laying aside of weights and of the easily besetting sin; but if the passage be taken, as it ought to be taken, in its contextual relationship, we shall see that the argument is wider in application.

The first word of the passage drives us in honesty to that which has preceded it. A passage commencing with the word "therefore" must of necessity be an appeal based upon an argument already advanced. The argument of this passage lies in all that has preceded it. Let us refresh our minds by passing over the content. The letter opens with a thunderclap. "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son." The writer of the letter takes two things for granted - God, and God's revelation of Himself to man. He then immediately begins the specific work of his letter. He is most evidently writing to those whose outlook has been narrow. The Hebrew people had come to think of themselves as the elect people of God, and imagined in their own unutterable narrowness and folly that God had forgotten or neglected the other nations of the earth. When members of this nation passed from Judaism into Christianity, all the things that ratified them in their ancient convictions were broken down and swept away. They believed that their economy had been administered by angels; that their leaders had been Moses, who led them out of slavery, and Joshua, who led them into the land; that their system of priesthood and religion was lonely and final.

And now mark the method of the writer. He shows them how in Christ are realized the underlying principles which they have so largely lost sight of; and that all the things which they would make their own peculiar possession are fulfilled by Christ. Ministry by angels, he does not deny; but the Son is above the angels, and the new economy means the ministration of the Son. Led out by Moses, he does not deny; but Moses led out, and could not lead in. The new leader leads out and leads in. Led in by Joshua, he agrees; but Joshua, having led them in, could not give them rest. The new Leader leads them in, and, Himself entering into rest, makes rest possible to all who trust in Him. Have they imagined the priesthood was peculiar to them? Let them remember that Melchisedek was not of their tribe or nation, and yet was a priest of God; and the last priest of humanity was after the pattern of Melchisedek, and in His great Priesthood all other priesthoods are forever swept away. So he leads them to see that in the Christ all the things intended in the creation of their national life are realized. But he declares that these things are fulfilled for the sake of the whole world; and gradually, as the argument proceeds, in stately measure and in unanswerable logic, the horizon is put further back, the outlook becomes more spacious, and the light becomes more glorious.

Finally, approaching the appeal on the basis of the teaching, he leads his readers through that wonderful gallery of the heroes and heroines of the past, and comes to the words of my text.

This appeal is that of a master of method. Appeal is made to the whole man. First to the intellect: "Seeing that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses." At the centre, to the will: "Let us lay aside" - "let us run." Finally, with a master touch, to the emotion at its highest: "Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith, Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame."

I propose this evening to bring you especially to the central appeal. Let all the language of appeal to the intellect, and the tender language of appeal to the emotion - both of which we will return to in time - be out of sight. What is it the writer says? Brethren, he says a very simple thing, and this is it: "Let us run the race." What race? The burden of my message to-night is an answer to that inquiry.

In speaking of Abraham, he has declared: "He looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." Of the others he declared: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth ... " "God is not ashamed of them to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city ... " "These all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise; God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."

Thus it is evident that the race which he urges upon those to whom he writes is not a race toward a heaven out of sight, but a race toward a city. Now let me stand away a little from the letter to the Hebrews and take the whole Bible as an illustration. My Bible opens in a garden, but it closes in a city. To me that fact is suggestive. A city expresses the result of a nation's dealing with a garden. In the heart of man there is a passion for the city. It is there because it is intended that it should be there. God's ideal of man is that he should take the garden and dress it, and bring out its final and ultimate result; and the last result of the garden of man is the establishment of a kingdom, the building of a city, the accomplishment of all the larger reaches of human life. And it is for that ultimate city that the men of the past have always hoped. Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees and set his face toward a city, not a city to be reached beyond the grave, but a city to be built in the world; not a beatific condition of life when the pathway of dust has come to an end, but the establishment in the world of a Divine order. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven. Thy name be hallowed. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done" - by men and women who have done with the world and reached heaven? No, a thousand times no! What then? "Thy name be hallowed. Thy Kingdom is come. Thy will be done as in heaven so on earth." The prayer which Christ taught us to pray - which summarizes all prayer, truly understood - is not a prayer that we may be able to pass through the world and win a heaven that lies beyond; it is a prayer that here, in this world, in the midst of its sin and its sorrow and its sighing, the will of God may be done, and the name of God perfectly hallowed by the coming of His Kingdom. In other words, the passion of the man of faith is not to hurry through the world and win heaven. The true passion of the man of faith is that God shall win the world and govern it for the blessing of humanity, for the healing of its wounds, for the ending of its sorrows, for the cancelling of its sins, for the establishment of the reign of right and truth, and peace and blessing over the whole world. And as these men of the olden time, according to the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, moved out into loneliness, leaving behind them established orders, they did it in order that they might find a new order - found a new order - in the world, and establish the Kingdom of God on earth. And every great movement and appeal in the history of national life has been in that direction. For, not only among the Hebrews did God work His will; not only them did He guide by the Shekinah; He has guided other nations. Long years ago a band of men went to a land across the sea. For what? So far as they are concerned - I am not dealing with the issue - to establish the Kingdom of God. And, slowly, through all the centuries, men have been looking for that.

I pray you remember the essential things of the final city. It is a city of exclusion and inclusion. What are the things excluded? The conditions. Tears, and mourning, and crying and pain. The character. The fearful, and the unbelieving, and the abominable. The conduct. Murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and liars. Night, the opportunity for evil; the unclean, the occasion of evil; that which makes a lie, the occupation of evil; the curse, which is the outcome of evil. And included within that city I find light, and life, and love, order and radiant beauty. It is a picture of the ultimate establishment of the Kingdom of God in the world. The ultimate of faith's vision and desire is the establishment of the Divine order in the world, the setting up of the Kingdom of God on this earth, The race that we are called on to run is a strenuous race toward the building of His city, the setting up of His kingdom, and the banishing from the broad earth of everything that is contrary to His ideal and contrary to the well-being of those whom He has created and whom He loves.

The appeal of the writer is to rise above everything that is narrow in outlook, to see the broader purposes of God, to gather into the affection all the round world, and to hasten along the line of earnest endeavour, the coming of the day when the city of God shall be built, and when men shall find in His perfect government their own final and perfect social order.

If that be the central intention of the text, I pray you now mark the preliminary word. In order to run that race the writer charges us, "Let us lay aside." What are we to lay aside? "Every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset." I think I need hardly tarry to speak of the meaning of the passage as to the weights that are to be laid aside. What is a weight? Anything that hinders running toward that goal. Love may be a weight, learning may be a weight. I am mentioning the highest things of set purpose, feeling that it is not necessary to discuss the lower. Anything that dims the vision of the ultimate, that kills the passion, is a weight, "Ye did run well. What did hinder you?" Well, that which hindered you is the weight, and, in view of this large purpose, in view of this ultimate victory, in view of this stupendous intention of God, beneficent, and glorious, and beautiful, the writer charges the men who name the name of Christ to lay aside the weights. Yet, brethren, I think he touches something that lies nearer to the centre of the whole necessity, when he says, "and the sin that doth so easily beset," What is the sin that doth so easily beset? I recognize the difficulty of answering the question. I take that word and bluntly translate, "the sin in good standing around." I suggest to you that the word means just exactly that - that the plain translation touches its deepest meaning. Sin in good standing around, sin that is not looked upon as vulgar. The word sin here must be interpreted by its use throughout this letter, and the sin against which he warns those who would run the race is the sin of unbelief. In order to understand what the "unbelief" of this letter is, I must now inquire what is the "belief" that the letter enjoins. Not mental conviction of a truth. That is not the belief of this letter, or of the New Testament. What, then, is belief? The answer of the life to the truth of which a man is convinced. The Greek with the accusative suggests infinitely more than belief on. I may believe every word of the Gospel of Christ, and be an immoral man. But if I believe into it, if I answer its claim, and walk in its light, and obey its command, and trust myself to its infinite and gracious promises, that is the belief which saves. Unbelief, therefore, is refusal to answer the light, and that is the sin that doth so easily beset. It is sin in good standing around. Now, I say no word against that intellectual attitude that demands a reason, but I do say that if we are to co-operate with God toward the building of His city, we must lay aside the sin of unbelief. Unbelief in what? In God, in man, and in the ultimate building of the city. Kadesh-Barnea still has its lesson. They came to the border, and they sent up into the strange new country spies to spy out the land, and they brought back from Kadesh-Barnea their report. There was a majority report, and there was a minority report, and, as is usual in such cases, the minority report was the true one. What was the difference between the majority and the minority report? The difference in the placing of a "but." Hear, I pray you, the majority report "The land is a fair land, and a good land; the grapes are luscious grapes; the rivers are beautiful rivers; the hills and the valleys are full of verdure and beauty, but there are walled cities and there are giants." The minority report put the "but" a little further on, and it said, "The land is a fair land and a good land; the grapes are luscious grapes; the rivers are beautiful rivers; the hills and the valleys are full of verdure; there are walled cities and there are giants; but God will give us the land."

We are going to make no contribution toward the building of the city, and the bringing in of righteousness, if we lose our clear vision of God; but we shall fight our fight, and sing our song, and put in our day of toil with hope and a song of gladness, if the vision of God be kept clear before the mind.

It is equally true that we must lay aside the sin of unbelief in man. The moment we talk about man as being hopeless, we are unfit to build the city of God. We can strike no blow for the delivery of man from the things we lament unless we can see clearly stamped upon every face the hallmark of the Divine image. Unless we see behind the ruin the capacity, unless we see as Christ saw that, however low man is, however broken, however bruised, however spoiled, he is yet worth dying for - unless you and I have that vision, we can do nothing to build the city. There must be belief in the coming of the city. Have you begun to say, It will never come? I remember twenty years ago hearing that prince among our preachers, Alexander Maclaren, of Manchester, say a simple and beautiful thing that has been an inspiration to me through all my work. "Let no man say, because the day seems as though it never would reach high noon, that therefore its light will never be perfect day. Let us, rather, say how fair will that day be on which the twilight dawn has lasted 1,900 years." That is the language of the man of faith. That is the language of the man who knows that at last the victory must be won, and the will of God be perfectly done. If we are to run that race we must lay aside the easily besetting sin of unbelief, and with firm confidence in God and in man, and, in the ultimate, we must give ourselves to the travail and the toil that makes the coming sure.

And now, in a closing word, in order to inspire these people with that faith, the writer of the letter reminds them of the cloud of witnesses. The writer is not describing witnesses who watch us, but those who witness to us. You say to me tonight, It is easy to condemn unbelief, but look at the slow moving of the centuries - the dark places of the earth. No, says the writer, see the witnesses! And I stop there, at the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, which you know so well. Abel worshiped, and Enoch walked, and Noah worked. Abraham obeyed, obtained, offered. Isaac and Jacob foretold. Moses, being preserved, chose. Israel had its Exodus, and came into possession. The writer goes on to say that time would fail him to tell of Gideon and of Barak, and of Samson and of Jephthah, of David also, of Samuel and of the prophets. And the surprising thing is the men he puts in. You would not have put Samson in there. You would not have put Jephthah in that list. O heart of man, take courage! Is there faith in thee? Even though thou dost blunder and seem to fail, thy faith is accounted for righteousness, for faith is something that helps towards the coming of the city. And then, as though deeds were most important, he masses them - "subdued," "wrought," "obtained," "stopped the mouths of lions," "quenched," "escaped," "waxed valiant."

The story is not ended. Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs, seers, visionaries - the men of today at whom we laugh are the men of faith. The vision creates a passion, the passion becomes a mission, and the life is lived till eventide. But the city is not built.

The fog's on the world today,

'Twill be on the world tomorrow;

Not all the strength of the sun

Can drive his bright spears thorough.

Yesterday and today

Have been heavy with care and sorrow,

I should faint if I did not see

The day that is after tomorrow.

The cause of the peoples I serve

Today in impatience and sorrow

Once more is defeated; but yet 'twill be won

The day that is after tomorrow.

And for me with spirit elate,

The mire and the fog I press through,

For heaven shines under the cloud

Of the day that is after tomorrow.

Seeing the witnesses, I take new heart and hope, and run my race.

But, last of all, looking not at the witnesses, but at the One Witness. Looking unto Jesus, the Author, the File Leader, the One Who goes first, Who takes precedence, and the Vindicator of faith - looking to Him. And if I look to Him, what do I See? I see One Who saw a vision, and for the joy that was set before Him, not the joy of escaping from the earth, but the joy of bringing God's government into the earth; not the joy of being away from the fight and the battle, but the joy of knowing that the issue of the fight and the ultimate of the battle is the establishment of the Divine order, He endured the cross, despising the shame.

Oh for the city of God! Oh for the coming of His Kingdom, for the healing of the wounds of humanity, for the ending of its strife, for the dawning of the last day, bright and glorious! If we would help it, we must run this race. There is no more pregnant or suggestive word in all the Gospel stories concerning our Lord than this. Hear it, I pray you, and I have done. It is a simple sentence, but unutterably sublime. "He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem." What did He see? Jerusalem, hostile, waiting to arrest and murder Him, but "He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." What did He see? Jerusalem doomed by its own sin - the sword hanging over it, but "He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." What did He see? Through Jerusalem, hostile and doomed, Jerusalem - the mother of us all, rebuilt - the order established, the victory won, and "He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem."

All the cities of the world today are hostile, are doomed, but are to be rebuilt. And it is the work of the Christian Church of whatever name or nation to see that ultimate vision, and then to begin the building just where they are, knowing that He will bring on the top stone, and that we shall join in the shout of the ultimate victory. Amen.