**VOLUME 5; CHAPTER 03 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**EXALTATION AND HUMBLING by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

*Luke 18:14*

THIS IS CHRIST'S APPLICATION OF HIS OWN PARABLE. Whatever other suggestiveness it may have, it is quite certain that here we are at the heart of the teaching. Most of the local color has faded from the picture; the temple has gone, and therefore prayers therein have ceased; the Pharisee and the publican have changed their names. The principles revealed in the parable abide until this hour; the man who exalts himself is still among us, though the form of his prayer may be altered; the sin-stricken soul still humbles himself and uses the identical prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner"; and Christ still watches both, and pronounces exactly the same judgment, "Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

The passion for perfection is in every life. Many men give up the search after it in despair. Many have wrong conceptions of what perfection is. Many others are seeking by false means to attain it. The passion for it, nevertheless, is found in every life.

The more conscious a man is of the strange and subtle forces within his own life; the more conscious he is of the complexity of his own nature; the more he is surprised by the dawning lights that break out of his own life, or by the shadows which reveal the possibilities of his own evil; the more he is conscious of the conflict within his own personality; the more that man is conscious also of the possibility of some high and noble destiny; the more that man hungers after realization. We all desire exaltation in the true sense of the word. None of us desires to come to the humbling of defeat, disaster, despair.

Listen to the voice within; the voice of your own life. It will startle you. It will inspire you. It will fill you with despair. It will sing the song of your possibilities. It will change the dirge of your helplessness. Such listening will make you desire the fulfilment of your life, the realization of possibilities that are within you. Then, this is the word of Christ to you, "Everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Whoso shall take the business of his own life into his own hands, and attempt to realize it according to his own way and his own wisdom, shall ruin it; but whoso shall recognize that his life is so wonderful a thing that he himself cannot know it, cannot legislate for it, cannot realize it, and shall humble himself according to the true law of that life, that man shall find it, that man shall come to life, not foreign to his own nature, but to the realization of what God meant him to be when God made him man.

What then is the supreme sin of all life? It is that of self-exaltation. All the sins of man's life are the issue of this sin; not lust, slavery to drink, or lying, or any of the specific sins which we so often denounce, these are not the sins for which a man is lost. They are the symptoms of a deeper sin, the evidences and activities of a profounder malady. What is that deeper sin, that profounder malady? Self-exaltation. The essence of sin is revealed in this phrase of Jesus; for remember, according to the perpetual teaching of Jesus, according to the whole message of revealed religion, self-exaltation means the exclusion of God; not necessarily intellectually, or not even necessarily emotionally, but volitionally so far as the actualities and activities of life are concerned; self-exaltation means the exiling of God, the dethronement of God, the forgetfulness of God, rebellion against God. That is the root sin. Self-exaltation is manifested in human life in different ways. It manifests itself in self-satisfaction. It manifests itself in a spirit of independence. It manifests itself in an attitude of definite and positive rebellion against religion. It manifests itself in a pride which fears to make confession of Christ and admit obedience to the law of God.

Self-exaltation, as self-satisfaction, is the peculiar sin of moral and respectable people. I do not want to be misunderstood. There is value in what the man of the world calls morality. When presently we have left the Sabbath day, and the sanctuary, and are back again in the market place, we must inevitably recognize the value of that lower level of morality which does not take into account the spirituality of human life, but which does avoid offence against human laws. That morality has its place, it has its value. But now we are in the presence of God; we are attempting to deal with things in the light of eternity; and as in the consciousness of that eternal and awe-inspiring presence we attempt to think of our lives, the moralities and respectabilities of common everyday life are out of sight, nay, they become in thousands of cases a severe and dangerous peril. Self-satisfaction is born of the fact that men have set up a standard of perfection lower than the Divine; and that the standard of perfection they have set up is the result of comparison of themselves with other men, and forgetfulness of the Divine purpose in their human life.

Of that attitude the Pharisee is the supreme example. The expression of self-satisfaction is that of despising others, holding in contempt the man who has descended to the depths. You who were never drunk, look with profound contempt upon the man drunk in the gutter. That you would not do if you held the highest standard of morality. That you will never do again when you have seen what is God's purpose in our own life. That you will never do when you have come into living fellowship with the great ideal of life presented to men by this Lord Christ of ours. You hold in contempt the man who has descended to vulgarity because your own standard is a low, base, mean standard.

When we cease comparing ourselves with other men, and compare ourselves with God's meaning when He made us, then we begin to discover the unutterable failure of the life that can be satisfied with such morality, and has never attempted to enter into the spacious inheritance which includes eternity and God, the things that never pass and perish.

Self-exaltation is manifested also as independence. Independence is the peculiar sin of those who are gifted with physical strength and with mental acumen. It is the sin of the man who takes his way from Monday morning to Saturday night, makes his plans, carries them out, accomplishes his purpose and never gets tired. Is that an evil thing? By no means. Let every man remember that is something to be thankful for. Ah, but there is the sin! The man I am referring to is not thankful. He makes his boast that he has never been helped in his life, that he has had to carve his own way, that he is a self-made man. That attitude is born of that man's failure to recognize that God is the Author of all the possibilities and powers in human nature. That man's attitude is the result of the fact that he has forgotten God. Moses long ago warned the Hebrew people not to forget that the very strength of their right hand, and their wit and wisdom, were gifts bestowed upon them. These men forget that the very substance of their everyday life with which they are doing business and are successful in this world are gifts bestowed upon them from above.

The expression of such independence is the prayerless life. This man never prays. He may bend the knee in the service of the sanctuary, a great many men do that who never pray. There can be bending of the knee but no bowing of the spirit. There can be repetition of words but no prayer. That is a life of self-exaltation.

Again, self-exaltation manifests itself as definite rebellion. This is the peculiar sin of the licentious. It is born of antagonism to Divine interference in human will. It expresses itself in contempt for religion and in attacks made upon religion. I am not speaking of the attitude of the man who has come face to face with the spectres of the mind, who is honestly facing intellectual difficulty in the realm of faith. I am thinking of the man who attacks religion, who laughs at Christianity, who attempts to undermine the faith of other men by his ribaldry. Attacks upon morality are always evidences of immorality in those who make them. A man objects to religion because he is in revolt against restraint, and that because restraint demands that he shall not commit the sin he is committing.

Once again. There is a pride of heart which is of the very essence of self-exaltation. It is the peculiar sin of people who are perfectly familiar with the will of God, perfectly familiar with the requirements of Jesus Christ, who know the evangel and know the terms of human salvation, and not only know them but believe in them. In what sense can these people be charged with pride? In that while the gospel is to them a pleasant song, they have never obeyed its commands, they never yielded themselves to its truth. Over and over again the reason is to be discovered in a pride of heart which is born of the fear of the opinions of other men; there are hundreds of young people in business houses who would be Christians but they dare not. There are scores of people in this West End who would be Christians, but they dare not. I would like to say in passing that I cannot understand that attitude of mind. I will try to be sympathetic with it. I will do my very best to urge men to abandon it, but I cannot understand it. The air is full of political strife, but there is no man who is a man who is ashamed, on the proper occasion, in the proper circumstances, in private or in public life, to avow his political conviction. In the name of God, what is it that makes a man ashamed to avow in private or in public that he is a Godly man, a Christian man? Wherein lies the explanation of this mystery? It is self-exaltation. To confess Christ is to share the reproach of Christ, for the offence of the Cross still abides. We have gilded the cross, we even wear as an ornament - alas that we should, but we do - but we have not taken the offence away, the sting is still there. Of that men are afraid, and this pride keeps them from the Christ, and therefore from the fulfilment of the meaning of their own lives.

All such self-exaltation is followed by humbling; and in every case the humbling is the necessary outcome of the exaltation. The humbling is not a capricious act whereby God does punish a man as in any sense apart from the folly of his own choice and activity. The humbling is the necessary outcome of that activity and of that attitude.

The humbling of the self-satisfied will consist in the discovery of self in the light of Divine requirement. The man that is perfectly satisfied with himself because he is no worse than other men comes then, when the light breaks upon him and he sees himself in the light of what God meant him to be, to the experience of humbling. It was Rabbie Burns who said -

Oh wad some power the giftie gie us

To see oursels as ithers see us.

Oh would some power the giftie gie us, to see ourselves as God sees us. That is far more important. I do not mean now, although that also is true, that we might see our failure as God sees it, but that we might see our possibilities as God sees them. I sometimes feel I would sacrifice life itself if I could but give to my brothers a vision of the glory of their own lives in the purpose and economy of God. There are so many who do not understand the dignity of their own manhood, who never see that it is given to them to enter into fellowship in travail and pain with God for the redemption of the race and the remaking of the world! Oh the tragedy of it! When a man comes to see what God meant him to be, and puts by the side of it the things that have satisfied him, his morality, his respectability by the standards of men, he comes to the most terrible humbling.

The humbling of the independent comes in the discovery of failure resulting from refusal to seek Divine guidance. There are men here who understand that. There are men here who have come to that humbling, but thank God it has been their salvation. Do you remember that hour in which you came to see the unutterable failure of your life simply because you had not sought Divine wisdom? There are tragedies of pain and suffering that come to us mysteriously, and for which we can give no account; we believe these God over-rules also; but how much tragedy there is in human life because men do not seek to know the will of God. Oh the tragedies in human lives because men do not ask God what He wants them to do, whether He wants them to be ministers or carpenters. There are tragedies in the ministry because men choose to enter it as a profession, and then find it to be hell, as every man does who enters for that reason. There are tragedies in the workshop, because men ought to have been preaching, or ought to have been on the distant field, and did not: ask God. High dignity and noble fulfilment may be ours in the humblest walk of life. I read a life of Garfield once; a wonderful life, with a wretched title, "From Log Cabin to White House." That title suggested that there was something derogatory in the log cabin, and more of dignity in the White House. That is not so. We can fulfil the function of eternity in a log cabin if God means us to be there, but we cannot if He wants us in the White House. The trouble is we fail in the log cabin or the White House if we forget God. The humbling comes to a man when he says, "I have played the fool" because I forgot God, and thought that by my own wit I could carve out my own career and make a success of my own life.

The humbling of rebellion against God will come in the discovery of the disaster resulting from that rebellion. I need not pause to argue that. You know it. May God make you true to the knowledge. You know perfectly well that the sin which is the real reason of your attack upon religion is un-making you. It is almost vulgarity to argue it; the hidden sin which makes you laugh at religion, is working paralysis and ruin in your life. You can tear our parable out, fling the New Testament away, shut the Bible, but you cannot escape from that. The humbling of the man who, through continued sin, turns his back upon and opposes religion, comes in the discovery of the disaster that follows upon his own line of conduct. The humbling of pride will come in that dread and yet great hour when the Son of Man shall come in His own glory and in the glory of His Father, and all the holy angels with Him," and then, in Christ's own words, "Whoso is ashamed of Me, of him will I be ashamed." The Son of Man is coming. I have no anxiety and no care to dispute now with you as to how or when He is coming. He is coming into His Kingdom, He is coming into His glory, He is coming to vindication, He is coming to triumph. If you are ashamed of Him while the conflict is one, He will be ashamed of you in that day. Not that He will indulge in reprisals and say, "Because you treated Me so I will treat you thus," but because your shame and fear of Him today will so undo you that He cannot recognize or receive you in the day of His ultimate triumph. You will be out of place in the society of righteousness and truth and loveliness; for you will be untrue, unrighteous, unlovely, if after having heard the winsome music of His call you decline to crown Him, and for fear and shame turn your back upon His high ideals, and upon the matchless music of His great evangel.

Now turn to the other side of the declaration for a closing word. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." What is self-humbling? This is it, "The publican … would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."

That is first a taking of the right place, "God be merciful unto me." I draw your attention not to the petition. "Be merciful," not even to the description "a sinner," but to this revelation of the true relation of human life, God and me. There is no room for a third person there. There is no priest there, thank God. There is no prophet there. The preacher is not there. He is done and out of the way. The real business between the soul and God begins when I have finished; God and me! Every man who will come as far as that tonight will win his own life. That will correct all the false attitudes and outlooks; God and me! Whether you will have it so or not, it is so. You are quite alone with God. How I love to linger on this. I think it is a recent revelation to me, the fact a man in a crowd is all by himself with God! Oh, the glory of it! I sometimes guess secrets through the windows of your eyes, but at last I cannot tell. Thank God He has secured the loneliness of every man with Himself.

Then follows the necessary confession of truth. I am a sinner. Measure yourself among your fellow men and you will stand erect. Compare yourself with the average man and you will proclaim your morality. But get alone with God, think of God, of His high holiness, His love - and there is nothing that brings conviction of sin to the heart as quickly as the real consciousness of the love of God - and you will say I am a sinner.

Then what? Praying the true prayer, "Be merciful unto me." No demanding from God your rights. I am weary to death of the men who tell me what they would do if they were God, and talk of their rights in the presence of God. What right has the barren fig tree to object if the proprietor should say, Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground? "Be merciful to me" is the only plea.

One other thing. When a man gets there and is conscious of his sin and breathes that prayer, he is giving expression to faith. No man will ever say that to God, save as there is in his soul the activity of faith in God. You will never ask blind fate to be merciful to you. You will never ask a "double-faced somewhat," consisting of intelligence and power working in co-operation, to be merciful to you! It would be no use. You will never pray to dynamite to be merciful to you. When a man says "Be merciful," he has heard the music of the Divine heart. Such a prayer is the expression of faith. That is the humbling for which Christ calls.

He says that if a man shall so humble himself, he shall be exalted. What is the exaltation? Christ gives it in the parable, and therefore I need no speculation. "I say unto you, This man," the publican, "went down to his house justified rather than the other." Do you say justification was a Pauline word? I ask you where he learned it. He learned it there. It is Christ's word! What is justification? God's answer to faith. What is that? The outflowing of mercy in reply to the cry of a man who claimed no morality but flung himself upon the compassion of his God. Justification, what is it? The sinner is a sinner no more; he is pardoned, cleansed, reinstated, remade! Justification, what is it? The realization of the position you assumed, God and me. The answer of God is, "Yes, you and I will have fellowship one with another! " Justification is the exaltation; forgiveness of sins, and the consciousness of that forgiveness in the soul, not by argument but by the direct touch of the Saviour God. Do you know it, my brother? If you do, it is a little difficult not to break out into song,

My God is reconciled,

His pardoning voice I hear,

He owns me for His child

I can no longer fear.

It is possible to stand outside that hymn and criticize it, laugh at it, philosophize concerning it, until you say there is no meaning in it; but you cannot take it out of my heart, out of my consciousness, you cannot take it out of my soul; the forgiveness of sins by the outflowing of infinite mercy, mercy that I know experimentally, and consequent fellowship with God. That is justification.

What then? Then the finding of my own life. When God made me by first creation - for He did make me in my first creation - He made me for some purpose and when I get back to Him He realizes it. "He that loseth his life shall find it."

Shall we not humble ourselves before God? Shall we not isolate ourselves with Him and let Him put upon us His measurement; and then yield ourselves to His mercy, casting ourselves upon His compassion. If we do, then all the strange mystery of our own life will be explained; not immediately, progressively and gradually; through discipline and by patience, we shall work out our own salvation because it is God that worketh in us both to will and to work of His good pleasure.

May we find our way to Christ in humbling, and so to the crown and throne of realized life. 47