**VOLUME 10; CHAPTER 21 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**"AS AN EAGLE ... THE LORD ... DID LEAD" by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*As an eagle that stirreth up her nest,*

*That fluttereth over her young,*

*He spread abroad his wings, he took them,*

*He bare them on his pinions:*

*The Lord alone did lead him.*

*Deuteronomy 32:11,12a*

THESE WORDS ARE TAKEN FROM THE SWAN SONG OF MOSES. In that song there is a remarkable alternation between praise and blame. It celebrates the goodness and faithfulness of God; it chronicles the wickedness and unfaithfulness of His people.

Calling to mind how God had found the people in a desert land, in the waste howling wilderness, and given them among the nations the place of prosperity and privilege, the singer employed this pictorial method of setting forth the way of the Divine government. It is peculiarly a figure of the wilderness, where for forty years Moses had kept his flocks. Probably he had often watched the eagles with their brood on some rocky height or sweeping over the broad and silent expanses. It was a daring figure, but he was warranted in using it, for forty years before he sang this song God Himself had employed it in speaking to him: "I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself."

The Bible is full of fine figures of speech and parabolic illustrations of the various aspects of the Divine government; but in all that it is intended to teach, none is more simple and sublime than this. It thrills with tenderness and with strength. It makes us conscious of the passion and power and purpose of God in all His dealings with those whom He loves.

First, let us observe the comparison broadly. In the eleventh verse we have a picture of the eagles in their activities, the mother stirring up her young, fluttering over them, the father spreading abroad his wings, taking the young and bearing them on his pinions. These words reveal to us the activities of the eagles, but they do not suggest their purpose. In the first phrase of the next verse we have a revelation of God's purpose - "The Lord … did lead him" - but there is no suggestion as to His activities, as to His methods. In the figure we discover the activities of the eagles: in the declaration we find the purpose of God. When we allow the first part of the text to be illuminated by the second, and the second by the first, we have the figure in its completeness. The purpose of the eagles is revealed by what is said concerning the purpose of the Lord. Why is this eagle stirring up her nest, fluttering over her young? Why is this eagle spreading abroad his wings, taking them, bearing them on his pinions? In order that they may lead the eaglets, in order that they may guide them. The activities of the Lord are revealed by what is said concerning the activities of the eagles. How does He lead His people? He stirs up their nests, He broods over them, He spreads His wings before them, He catches them on His wings, and carries them.

In the text, then, in its entirety, we have a revelation of God, a revelation of His activities in government, and a revelation of His purpose through those activities.

First, let us consider the revelation of God. There is a touch of genuine Eastern color about this. In the Bible, the eagle is more than once employed as the symbol of Deity. When Ezekiel was in captivity on the banks of the river Chebar he had a vision of God, and in the midst of the flashing glory of the light, and amid the turning of the mystic wheels, he saw faces: the face of the lion, the face of the ox, the face of a man, and the face of an eagle, all being manifestations of life proceeding from God, having its origin in God. Authority was suggested by the face of the lion; service, by that of the ox; the highest form of creation, by that of the man; while the eagle, with unflinching eyes, and wings spread for flight into the abysmal depths of mysteries that are beyond human ken, was the symbol of Deity. When, long after, the seer of the Galilean lake was imprisoned in Patmos, washed by the waters of the sea, he saw a door open in heaven, and round about the throne four living ones having the same faces that Ezekiel saw, the faces of the lion, the ox, the man, and the eagle. The Fathers of the Church interpreted the Gospel narratives by this symbolism, not always agreeing in their placing of the signs, but all making the eagle the symbol of John. For myself, I find in Matthew the face of the lion of the tribe of Judah, the King; in Mark, the face of the ox, pointing to service, priesthood, sacrifice; in Luke, the face of a man, the highest glory in God's creation; and in John, the face of the eagle, the symbol of Deity.

In our text, all the mystic wonder of the symbolism is brought down to simplest terms. Let us watch the scene as therein described. First, the mother eagle is seen doing a strange thing, stirring up the nest, the nest in which the eaglets, having been fed, are sleeping, and will sleep on until they are hungry again. The word "stirreth" is, undoubtedly, an accurate one here, but its root meaning is suggestive: the mother is awakening the birds, disturbing them in their slumber. Next, she is seen fluttering over her young, and the word "fluttering" means - and I prefer to use it - brooding. She is brooding over the birds she has disturbed. Then the father bird is seen spreading his wings in the air. The mother has wakened the eaglets, she has made them conscious of her mother heart as she brooded over them; and now the father spreads his wings, and the eaglets try to do the same thing - they flutter and stumble, and fall. Now the last phase is seen, the father is beneath them, has caught them on his wings, and is bearing them back.

That is God, said the singer of the olden time, and that is how God deals with His people. What, then, does this figure reveal to us of God? It is, first of all, a revelation of His Parenthood, that is, of the Motherhood of God and of the Fatherhood of God. The personal pronoun "He" is capitalized at the beginning of the third and fourth lines of this eleventh verse simply to conform to the rules of poetry, and not to suggest that the figure merges into a direct description of the activity of God at that point. The masculine pronoun is undoubtedly accurate, and thus we see the mother and father, the mother bird disturbing the eaglets and brooding over them, while the father bird spreads his wings, and presently bears them on his pinions. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, the feminine; fluttereth over her young, the feminine; he, the masculine, spread abroad his wings, and he, the masculine, bare them on his pinions. Thus we have a revelation of that supreme and glorious fact, that in God fatherhood and motherhood merge. We have never grasped the fullest fact concerning God until we have recognized the double truth.

Look at the eagles again as they are seen with their young, and mark them well. The eaglets are of the very being and nature of the eagles, and therefore are the supreme objects of the love of the mother bird as she broods over them, and of the father bird as he spreads his great wings before them. Here also the figure holds good. Man is of the very being and nature of God, and therefore he is the supreme object of God's love. This is the poetic and beautiful suggestion of this picture of the eagles with the eaglets. As the eagles love the eaglets because they are of their very nature and being, so God loves man because he is of God's very nature, of His very Being. This is fundamental. It is only in proportion as we grasp this underlying truth that all the beauty of that which follows will be apprehended. All that we see in the picture, the disturbing of the young birds, the brooding over them, the spreading of the wings, and the carrying on the pinions, all must be interpreted by motherhood and fatherhood.

But, again, as I watch the eagles at their work I am impressed with their strength and the consequent security of the eaglets. Watch the eagles' wings in the storm. They seem to beat back the rushing of the wind and master it, or travel with it in excellency of strength. Watch the eagles' wings in the hour of conflict, and see with what skill they beat down the foe that would harm the eaglets. Watch the wings as they brood over the eaglets, and mark their gentleness. Gentleness is not weakness; gentleness is strength held in restraint. We talk, said George Matheson, of the gentleness of the brook. The brook has no gentleness. It rushes and roars down its way over the pebbles. If we would speak of gentleness let us stand on the beach and see the mighty ocean with silver foam kiss the feet of the little child that plays on the shore. That is gentleness.

That is the true picture of God. Listen to some of the ancient singers:

Hide me under the shadow of Thy wings.

The children of men take refuge under the shadow of Thy wings.

I will take refuge under the covert of Thy wings.

Under the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice,

Or listen to another, who employs the same figure, but in another way. Singing of God, he said:

He flew swiftly upon the wings of the wind.

The wings of the eagle seem stronger than the wind, but when this singer used the figure he magnificently modified it, and made the wind itself the wings of God:

He flew swiftly upon the wings of the wind.

When, then, did He fly swiftly on the wings of the wind? This is what the singer said:

In my distress I called upon the Lord.

That was when "He flew swiftly upon the wings of the wind."

The glorious strength of God is such that the figure breaks down, and the metaphor fails, and we are left face to face with the naked fact, and of the consequent security of all those who are underneath His wings as they brood, or over His wings as He carries them.

In the figure there is, at least, a suggestion of the nature of God. What is the nature of the eagle? It dwells on high, and it takes its flight sunward, with eyes that never flinch as they are fixed on the light. But here supremely the figure suggests, and then breaks down; and whenever a figure thus breaks down it is fulfilling its highest function, for it is leading us beyond itself to the fact which it is intended to suggest. The eagle is the mystic sign of Deity because of its flight to the heights; but there the figure halts, for God is the ultimate height. The eagle is the symbol of Deity, because with unflinching gaze it beholds the light of the sun and soars into it, until human eyes can no longer follow it; but there the figure breaks down, for God is the light.

But now let us consider the activities of the eagles as representing the activities of God in His government. The first activity is suggested by the words: "As an eagle that stirreth up her nest"; that is disturbance. The next, by the words: "That broodeth over her young"; that is love assuring the disturbed ones that it is still active. The next, by the words: "He spread abroad his wings"; that is inspiration and illustration in order that those disturbed should be taught to fly. The last, by the words: "He took them, he bare them on his pinions"; that is protection that comes when, essaying to obey inspiration and illustration, the eaglets flutter and fall.

These are the elements of the Divine government of human lives. The first is ever that of disturbance. The life that is never disturbed by God is dying and withering and falling. God is forever more stirring up the nest, rousing us from our lethargy, lest, perchance, we also should become like Jeshurun, who waxed fat and kicked in his sleekness, forgetting not God only, but his own manhood. God disturbs the place of our abode; the home is stricken, and we are flung out. Our plans, so carefully and so prayerfully made, are broken down. Our very conceptions, the highest and the best, have to be reconsidered, and we discover that somewhere in our highest thinking we were wrong. God plunges us into a maelstrom in order that we may know how wrong we were. Our very service, the highest service we can render, service which He has appointed, is suddenly interfered with by the changing of our strength to weakness, or by a command that we relinquish it for another that seems less important, God is always disturbing us.

There is nothing more perilous than forming a false estimate of the meaning of disturbed life, that we should say of some soul who, through long years has always been tempest-tossed, buffeted, hurled hither and thither by storms, that there must be something wrong with him. It may be that God is preparing that soul for larger vision, clearer seeing of the light, and upward movement toward heights to which we have never mounted. As the eagle stirs up the nest, and will not allow the eaglets to settle into the lethargy of a sleep that follows feeding, so God stirs up the nest, takes away the loved one, brings into the midst of life the pain and shadow of suffering, contradicts our highest plans, hurls us out from the place where we love to be, makes us feel the sweeping of the storm, and so prevents the fatal lethargies that destroy.

But that is not all. The eagle also "broodeth over her young." The figure is the more striking in that it so closely follows the other. Probably, if I had been writing this, I should have put it the other way: first, the brooding, and then the disturbing, and this because I know neither the eagle nor God as perfectly as did Moses. He knew both. He had watched the eagle, and he knew God. The first thing is disturbance, and then the brooding over the young. Here we cannot be too realistic in our imagination. Look carefully at that eyrie on the rocky height. There are the eaglets and the mother bird, and she disturbs them who fain would sleep in the quietness that follows feeding; she will not have it so, she wakes them, she pushes them with her wings to the very edge of the nest, and presently will push them out. Then, as they are puzzled and fearful, she flutters over them, she broods over them, she says to them, in effect: Yes, I have disturbed you, but I am your mother! She broodeth over her young. That, also, is a picture of God. He disturbs, but He gives to the soul an immediate qualification of the disturbance, not by explaining its meaning, but by assuring the heart concerning Himself. Nothing is more wonderful than this. Souls that are struggling, but who, nevertheless, believe in God, are constantly made conscious of this brooding love of God. Again and again, during these months of desolation and disturbance, when some loved one has been taken away, plans have been broken up, and all that looked so fair has become desolate, have we heard it said: "I cannot understand it; but I am perfectly sure of His love. It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth to Him good!" What has inspired the word? God - God brooding over the heart, giving the heart that knowledge of Himself, offering no explanation of the meaning of the disturbance, but assuring the troubled soul that there is a meaning in it, that there is wisdom in it. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." Why has He taken away? I do not know, I cannot tell, I cannot see the meaning of it; it seems to have no meaning! But "blessed be the name of the Lord." When the soul says that, it is because God, like a mother, broods over the heart, and whispers the sweet secret into the soul: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

But the figure moves on in its revelation of the Divine activity. The mother eagle who has disturbed, and who has fluttered broodingly over the young, now watches; and the father spreads abroad his wings. By this act he is insisting on the fulfilment of the purpose of the disturbance and the brooding of the mother. He spreads his wings in front of them, they being now fully awake, and fully comforted. She waked them when she disturbed them, comforted them when she brooded over them. Now, in effect, he says: This is what we mean. He spreads his wings, and by inherent instinct, the eaglets begin to spread their wings. As in imagination, we watch them, we cannot help laughing at them, their movements are so grotesque. I am sure the mother and the father laugh at them with that tender sympathetic laughter that is always in the heart of parents for the follies of child life.

All that also is a true picture of God, Who is always going before us, and yet is ever near enough to show us how to do the things He demands if we are but looking at Him. Too often the trouble with us is that we are not watching our God. If we were doing so we should find that when He has disturbed us, comforted us, He will show us what He means, and so help us to spread our wings.

I watch the eaglets doing it, fearful as they find themselves flung out of the nest; in the element of the air, so strange to them, they begin to beat with their wings, but they are going down, they are falling. Now comes the last phase of the revelation. The father swoops beneath them, catches them on his broad pinions. They try and fail, but they never fall! In their trying and their failing he is nigh, and when they fail and would fall, he is beneath them, bearing them on his pinions. That process is repeated until the day comes when the eaglets will not want the father underneath; their own wings will find their strength, and they will fly. So with us. We shall fail, but we shall not fall. Our attempts will seem grotesque to us, and to others who watch us, but our Father will always catch us on His wings, and bear us up.

Finally, let us consider the purpose revealed by the figure. What are the eagles doing with the eaglets? The eagles are developing the eaglets' natural powers. They are eagles too. What is God doing in His government of our lives? He is developing our natural powers. Man is made for God; he is in the Divine image and likeness. By all God's government, by His disturbing of us, by His brooding over us, by His guidance of us, when on His wings He is catching us when we fail and flutter and fall; by all these things He is bringing us to the fulfilment of our own destiny, to the realization of our own manhood. The supreme tragedy of human life is that man thinks so much less of himself than God thinks of him.

Man is not flesh, man is not flesh, but fire!

His senses cheat him, and his vision lies.

Swifter and keener than his soul's desire,

The flame that mothers him eludes his eyes.

That is why God disturbs him. God wakes man from the lethargy which oftentimes comes from overfeeding, from the attempt to satisfy the life with the things of dust. The purpose of the Divine government is to end weakness. Only by flight can eagles fly, only by struggle can strength be gained. That is an illuminative story of the boy who came to his mother with the chrysalis of a glorious butterfly. He knew something of the beauty that was hidden there; he had been told about it. He watched the chrysalis until he saw it beginning to burst; he observed the struggle, and a mistaken pity in his heart said, Oh, let me help it! Then with scissors he snipped the chrysalis, and made it easy! With what result? Those gorgeous wings were never spread! You cannot help the butterfly; from the chrysalis it must struggle to the glory of its final beauty.

So also man can come to the final dignity of his own being and the fulness of the meaning of his own life only as God disturbs him, rouses him from the lethargy which means death. By all the processes of strain and stress and disturbance, by His brooding love, by the inspiration of His out-spread wings as He lures us toward flight, by the great strength with which He swoops beneath us and catches us on His pinions, by all this He is perfecting our strength and leading us to the heights as He develops within us His own thought for us.

In its first application, the word of the singer is national. It was to a nation that this thing was said. Oh the peril, the ghastly peril of failing to fulfil national destiny by reason of prosperity! No nation ever failed to fulfil its destiny because of adversity. It is prosperity that blasts a nation. Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked. He became sleek and forgot God. That was the trouble threatening our own nation, and therefore I say it with great solemnity, we thank God when He disturbs us. He is waking us from our lethargy that we may find our wings and reach the heights.

But if the first application is to the nation, the application of the song is also personal. Let it sing to us the sacred story of our own dignity. Let it argue His meaning as He disturbs us, and broods over us. Let us trust and obey, knowing that if we fail and fall, His pinions will be underneath; and if we wake with the horror of the disturbance His wings will be over us. The day will come when we shall spread our wings and find the meaning of God and the meaning of our own lives.