**VOLUME 1; CHAPTER 9 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**MY FRIEND by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*He that maketh many friends doeth it to his own destruction; but there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.*

*Deuteronomy 18:24*

THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE RENDERING OF this text in the Authorized Version must notice the very striking change of the revision in the first part of the verse. In the King James Version it reads: "A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." There is no doubt that the rendering as we have it now is true to the original. The Authorized Version was due to a mistake made by confusing two words which are very nearly alike, and yet have totally different meanings. In the new rendering we see that which was most certainly in the mind of the Preacher. He is speaking to young people on the subject of friendship, and he warns them that the man of many acquaintances is in danger, but that there is a kind of friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

I am perfectly well aware that at the first my text has no application such as I propose to make of it this evening. You would at once be conscious when I read such a text that I am going to talk about my Friend, my one Friend. But when these words were written that Friend was not in view save as a great ideal. As a matter of fact, the Hebrew words used here for friend are quite distinct, and carry two meanings. The word translated "friends" in the first part of text simply means associates or acquaintances. That translated "friend" is different, and may with all accuracy be translated "lover," and that conception harmonizes perfectly w an earlier proverb. "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." The true quality of friendship is love, and the one expression of perfect friendship is that of adherence, loyalty, or, again in the somewhat rough and striking translation of both versions, a friend is one who "sticketh closer than a brother."

The heart of man is forever craving friendship. Let every man beware of the crowd of acquaintances. Let every man value the very highest the friend who is a true lover. It a little difficult in June days to distinguish between the acquaintance and the friend. We have to wait for November and December. It is not easy to know your friends when sea is smooth and reflects heaven's blue. You will find them when the sky is overcast and Euroclydon beats the deep into fury, and you are in peril. It is not quite easy to distinguish between acquaintances and friends in your days of prosperity. "A brother is born for adversity." You discover him only then. Friendship is tested by tempest. May we not say that difference between acquaintances and friends is the difference between the reeds that grow by the river side and the rough, gnarled old oak stick when you are contemplating climbing hills. If I have a rough hill to climb give me one rugged oak stick to lean on rather than a hundred reeds that grow in perpetual green by the river bank. If I have difficulty to face and burdens to bear and tempests to weather, give me my friend - he may be very rough, quite a curious specimen humanity, but he loves me, and he sticks - rather than a hundred butterflies who are round me while the sun shines and are gone when storms lower. That was the Preacher's meaning. It was a valuable meaning. It is a great philosophy of friendship, and we do well to consider it.

Interesting as the theme may be, I do not intend to discuss this subject of friendship on the level of the ordinary friendship of these passing days. When the Preacher said, "'There is a lover that sticketh closer than a brother," he stated a high ideal of friendship, the very highest and the very best that his eyes had seen or his heart had conceived. In the process of the centuries He appeared, incarnate, the one true Friend of all men.

This evening I want to introduce you to my Friend. I have found this One of whom the Preacher spoke so long is ago. I know Him personally, intimately, though not yet fully. I am not going to discuss the philosophy of friendship. I am not going to portray the ideal of friendship. I want to talk to you about my Friend, to tell you some things about Him, and then how you also, if you will, may come into the circle of His friendship, among those to whom He says in infinite tenderness and love, "No longer do I call you servants ... I have called you friends."

Therefore, you will understand that I am speaking tonight, as I sometimes say, not as an advocate, but as a witness. With all reverent familiarity I want to tell you what I have found this Friend to be. You say, "Why do you come with this message?" This message, like those of recent Sunday evenings, has grown out of the necessity of the hour. I attempted to speak last Sunday night of the way in which men and women in conflict with evil may hope to be successful. I directed them to that philosophy of conflict contained in the words of James, "Submit to God; resist the devil." In the course of my message I referred to the loneliness of many in this great London, and once again I have been dealing all the week, by correspondence or in other way, with those who found that word touch a chord in their hearts. There are a great many lonely men and women in London. If before I turn to my real subject I say some word or two about them, I crave the patience of those who are not feeling lonely. There are so many lonely souls all about us. There are young people in business houses in this district who are awfully alone. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, nine in the morning till nine at night; Friday the same; Saturday, nine till eleven; Thursday, nine till five, and then - no friend! The home far away in some country place. The loved ones who understand best, not nigh at hand. It may be no home worth the name, no lovers, no friends who really care. I do not think I can say tonight all that ought to be said and all I want to say about such a condition of things. I think I shall have a good deal to say about it before long. I want to talk to those who are in such places. Perhaps there are some even more lonely. I have not described your situation, but you are awfully alone. Hundreds of people on the streets as you walk along, but no one who knows you. The most lonely moment I ever had in my life was in 1896, when I first landed in New York. I stepped from the great steam-boat on to the wharf, and there were hundreds of people meeting friends, but no one meeting me. Not a voice I knew, not a face that was familiar, and I stood for a few moments feeling desolately lonely. I am never lonely now when I go there, but I was lonely for that first hour. And that was a mere nothing, because I could find my way to friends, and presently I did; but, oh, these men and women in London who are alone! I would like to say in passing that it is part of the work of Jesus Christ to see to it that such hours as I have named cease once and for all. Until that work is accomplished it is the work of Jesus Christ to find these lonely people and introduce them to a circle of living, warm, lover-like affection. God help us to do it. We are going to try.

There is something needed beyond anything we can do on such lines. For the rest of this evening I want to speak to the lonely hearts in this great crowd. All the rest of you be patient. Thank God if you are not alone, and pray that I may so speak of my Friend Who never leaves me utterly alone, that I may win these lonely hearts to Him, and introduce them to a comradeship absolute in its perfection.

My Friend is first of all a lover. He fulfils that fundamental condition of friendship which the Preacher of long ago described. To my unutterable surprise, He says He loves me. The Bible, treat it as you will, speak of it from whatever standpoint you will, have all the difficulties you may concerning its construction, is His love letter to me. And whereas it says many things I have not yet understood, the one message ringing through it from beginning to end is the message of love. The Friend Who drew near to men nineteen hundred years ago in such warm and tender nearness that they could touch and handle and see Him is the Eternal Friend of men, closer than breathing in spiritual presence forevermore, and always saying to me that He loves them. The one great message of this Letter is a love message. I take it up and read it, and the thing that comes home to my heart startling me, surprising me, is that the pure, white, holy God loves me not-withstanding my sin, notwithstanding my pollution and my failure. My Friend loves me in spite of all my degradation.

More than that, He has demonstrated His love so as to bring conviction to my heart. Whether I have responded or not is not the question for the moment. I simply state the fact. "God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." He explains that in His own words, for He rises to the highest conception possible to the mind of man when He says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." This is your greatest conception of love; you cannot climb higher than this. There is no supremer proof of love than that a man should lay down his life for his friends. But my Friend died for me while I was yet a sinner, while all the set of my life was against His true and holy purpose, while all the influences and forces of my being were running counter to the influences and forces of His holiness and tenderness. Even then my Friend died for me. He laid down His life for me. Not only is it true that my Friend tells me of His love. It is also true that He has demonstrated His love to my heart's deepest and profoundest conviction. My Friend is a lover. Out of that come all the other things. Because my Friend is a lover He is faithful. He is true. He is tender. He is strong. He is faithful to me, never deserting, never tiring of me. It was Shakespeare who sang, "Love is not love that alters when it alteration finds." Like that of the Preacher of old, that high ideal has had its perfect fulfilment in the case of my Friend. One of the pictures which I think I love to dwell upon almost more than any other in this connection is the picture of Jesus standing upon the mountain and leaving His loved ones. He gives them their great commission, and tells them what they are to do. Then with hands stretched out in blessing He vanishes out of their sight and the heavens receive Him. The question that comes to me is this, Will He, having left the pathway of human sorrow and need, be unmindful of the men He has left behind, for this is how I have been disappointed in human friendships. The man that was my friend when we trod the same rough path together - or seemed to be my friend - when he escaped from the roughness, and found the place of ease, forgot the man with whom he tramped the rough pathway. There is a whole philosophy in a word of the Old Testament, "The butler forgat Joseph." As I once heard Thomas Champness say, "His name is not always Butler." This Man is going, will He forget them? The next thing that happens, to their unutterable surprise, is the coming out of the mystery of the all-encompassing heaven of God of two men in white, who stand by them and say, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? This Jesus, which was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven." I have not quoted that to discuss the meaning of what they said, but to bring you face to face with the fact of their coming. He loved them, this wondrous Man, this more than Man, this mystery of Being, so warm that they had touched Him, so distant that they had never comprehended Him. He has left them, and, call it imagination if you will, when He left them and the heavens enfolded Him, His first thought was for the men He had left behind Him. The glorified Man of Nazareth, even in heaven's own light, called two messengers, ministers of the presence of God, and said, "Go, comfort the men I have left, and tell them I am coming again." My Friend never forgets me, never deserts me. He does not find any in high heaven in whom He takes a greater interest than He takes in me.

His faithfulness is of another pattern also. He is my Advocate against slanderers. He stands forevermore pleading my cause in the presence of God against all the lies that can be invented against my soul. My Friend is true as well as faithful.

My Friend rebukes me. He tells me in my deepest heart when I am wrong. I do not always like His rebuke. I shrink from it and try to excuse the thing He rebukes; but He is persistent. Hear the paradox and know its truth. With pitiless pity He refuses to make peace with any evil thing in my nature, in my habit, in my life. My Friend is true to me. When He sees that my thinking and acting are likely to lead me astray from the path that leads to ultimate victory He rebukes me, and His rebuke is severe. If you would know how severe, listen to His answer when one of His friends said to Him in seeming pity about the cross, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto Thee." Jesus, looking into the face of Peter, said, "Get thee behind me, Satan." It was harsh, but it was very tender. It seemed unkind, but it was real friendship.

Do you think He ne'er reproves me? What a false Friend He would be

If He never, never told me of the sins which He must see.

It is also true that He praises me. It is a great proof of friendship to be able to do that. I have known people in this world who have come to me and said, "I am your friend, and now I am going to be faithful to you." I always try to escape. That may be a confession of weakness, but it is true. The true friend will rebuke, but he will also praise. Some people seem to think that my Friend will never say, "Well done," until we stand before His throne. It is a mistake. At the risk of being misunderstood, I tell you this, He often says, "Well done," even now. At eventide, when the shadows are lengthening and the day's work is over, and the heart is sore and sad that it has done so ill, in quiet communion He comes and says, "Well done." I am always surprised when He says it, but He says it. He does not postpone His tender caresses to the moment when the infinite light shall be about us. He comes with me all the way, and I am often surprised to hear the accents of His voice saying, "Well done." You know it is true. There are more than a thousand witnesses in this house upon whom I could call, and they would tell you it is true. Yesterday I was tempted. I resisted, almost to blood, and I won, although I was wounded in the winning, and I heard Him in my deepest heart say, "Well done." He is a true friend. He rebukes me for my wandering. He praises me for every victory. He knows how to save me by the severity of His reproof, and how to help me by the tender faithfulness of His praise.

This Friend is tender beyond all telling, in my sorrows always sympathetic. We have all had, or shall have, some sorrows into which our nearest and dearest earthly friend cannot come. I have never yet had a day of sorrow in which I did not find my Friend at hand. Sometimes He is quite silent, never a word, nor a touch of His hand, and I have thought I was alone; but in the moment when my heart has said, Where is my Friend? - not perhaps by word, but by a sudden mystic consciousness of His love - I have known He was there, silent, and in the silence gathering into His own dear heart of infinite love all my sorrow. He is, moreover, gentle with all my weakness. Two or three years ago I found what gentleness is, and that in a definition. It is not often we learn things from a definition, but George Matheson defined gentleness for me, and now I know what it is. He said, "Gentleness is strength held in check." I cannot quote his actual words here, but only his thought. One speaks of the gentleness of the brook. There is no gentleness in the brook. It rushes and presses, laughs and roars, and does all it can with its puny strength. There is no gentleness there. But if you will stand by the mighty ocean when there is such a tide as "moving seems asleep," and the great waters kiss the shore, and your little one paddles upon its edge, and is kissed by the crest of the wave, that is gentleness. With one great uprising the sea might engulf the child, but its strength is held in check. My Friend is so gentle. He might crush me even by the inflow of His strength. He might blind me by the very vision of His glory, but He does not. He bends over me and says, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." He is waiting for me. He has been waiting all my life to say some things, but He has not said them yet, because I cannot bear them. My Friend is tender with a great gentleness that waits for my weakness.

Yet my Friend is strong, so strong that He can overcome sin, and Satan, and self. Sin overcomes me even yet. Satan overcomes me yet. Self-uprising blots the sun out of the heavens for me even yet, but it is always because I try my strength against sin, or Satan, or self, and forget my Friend. I never hand self over to Him but that He puts His cooling hand on the pulses of desire, and self is conquered. I never remit to Him the conflict with the foe but that the Lion of Judah overcomes the Lion who roars, seeking to destroy. I never hand over sin to Him in any of its hundred forms but that "He breaks the power of cancelled sin and sets the prisoner free." My Friend is strong on my behalf against all the foes that oppose themselves, and He is strong in my weakness. If He is gentle with my weakness He is also strong. To that wicket gate somewhere in the castle of Man-soul that I do not know how to guard, and in trying to guard which I have failed, and the enemy has broken in, my Friend will come and make it the mightiest in all the castle. That is but another way of saying what Paul said. I repeat it, out of an experience far off from his it may be, yet real to me, "He hath said unto me ... My power is made perfect in weakness ... when I am weak, then am I strong."

Then my Friend is rich. He owns the whole earth. All the keys hang at His girdle. When in resurrection glory He appeared to one of His friends in the olden days He named some of the keys, but not all. He said, "I am ... the Living One; ... and I have the keys of death and of Hades." But there are other keys upon His girdle; they are all there - keys of knowledge and wisdom, the keys of light and of love. My Friend can admit me into the mystic meaning of the daisy and lift this poor frail life of mine into fellowship with the rhythmic order of the infinite universe of God. This world is His. There is never a bank of flowers but that they exist through His power. There is never a glorious sunset that flames upon my vision but that His hand has painted it. There is no music worth the name but that He presided over its first thinking. There is no colour but that is an expression of my Friend's beauty. I am seeing Him increasingly as the days go by in all the colours of life, and in all the greys moreover, and in the sombreness. My Friend owns the world, and I am finding out that you cannot introduce me to anything that is in itself essentially beautiful but that at its heart my Friend is sitting as King. You cannot bring me to anything that is worth having in the world of things, moral or mental, of music or literature, but that I find my Friend will lead me a little deeper and swing the door a little wider, and fling the horizon a little further back. All the world belongs to Him, and more than that. If it be true that there are many keys at His girdle and He is Lord of the world, then He is Lord of the heavens, and there are many diadems upon His brow. When this soul of mine thinks beyond dust into the realm of deity, my Friend is still on the throne. When this life of mine, chained for the moment to the things of time and sense, flings itself out to the infinite and eternal, I find that in the midst of the glory is my Friend, and heaven is already familiar ground to me, for my Friend has gone to prepare an abiding place for me, and He whispers in my heart as I tramp the dusty road, "Where I am there you may he also." My Friend is Lord and Master of Time and Eternity, of this world and the next.

Once again - and now what word shall I use? I must use a commonplace for lack of something finer - my Friend is generous. He gives me all I need, and infinitely more, for He shares with me all He has. His very life He makes my life. His very resurrection glory is my inheritance.

If these things are too high and too far and too distant, let us get back again to the things of time and sense. He gives me the world that belongs to Him. This world is mine tonight, in its every spear of emerald green, in all the music of the thundering sea, in all the healthfulness of its blowing winds. They are all mine. You may put up a notice, "Trespassers are not allowed," but because my Friend holds all the earth I can look over your hedge and possess what you only own, and there is an infinite difference between the two things. He has given me Himself, and with Himself all things.

"Are you never lonely?" you ask me. Well, dear heart, never perhaps quite as you are, for today my path lies differently, and I have my home and my loved ones, but I have been alone as you are in the days gone by. I have been in a city where there was no one who seemed to know or care, and even today there are lonely hours. Even today there are moments when even my dearest and nearest - and how near and dear they are only my heart knows - are excluded, hours of mystery and questioning, hours when the heart grows faint; but I never have an hour now in which I cannot find my Friend if I will. In the midst of the city, right there in the place of business, He is close at hand, a lover "Who sticketh closer than a brother." How shall I say it? I cannot say it as it ought to be said. May God the Holy Spirit sing it into your heart tonight as the very Evangel of hope.

How may all lonely souls come into His circle of friends? It is quite easy for you to enter the circle, because this Friend is your Friend long before you are His, and He wants your friendship. The advance is on His side, not on yours. Listen to the tender and strong words He spoke to the first group of His earthly friends, "Ye have not chosen me but I have chosen you." That is still true. Is your heart turning toward Him in its loneliness? Are you crying out for His comradeship? He has been seeking yours for a long, long time. There is the first message of hope I bring you in answer to your question. Let Him speak again if you would desire to know how to enter the circle of His friendship. This is what He says, "Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you." You say that is difficult. Listen to the first thing He commands you to do. "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." Begin there, and He numbers you at one amongst His friends, and all the rest of the commandments He will give you one by one as you are able to bear.

You need not understand the mystery of His Person, you need not be able to formulate a theory of His Atonement, but you are to come to Him and give yourself to Him. You are to say, "Is this the Friend who seeks my friendship? I will be His." And then, bending over you, He will say to you, "No longer do I call you servants ... I have called you friends."

Behold, a Stranger at the door!

He gently knocks, has knocked before;

Has waited long; is waiting still:

You use no other friend so ill.

But will He prove a friend indeed?

He will: the very friend you need;

The friend of sinners, yes, 'tis He,

With garments dyed at Calvary.

O lovely attitude! He stands

With melting heart and open hands;

O matchless kindness! and He shows

This matchless kindness to His foes.

Admit Him, ere His anger burn,

Lest He depart and ne'er return:

Admit Him, or the hour's at hand

When at His door denied you'll stand.

Admit Him, for the human breast

Ne'er entertained so kind a guest:

No mortal tongue their joys can tell,

With whom He condescends to dwell.

Sov'reign of souls! Thou Prince of Peace!

O may thy gentle reign increase:

Throw wide the door, each willing mind;

And be His empire all mankind!