**VOLUME 1; CHAPTER 11 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**IF CHRIST DID NOT RISE - WHAT THEN? by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain. ... If Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. ... If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable.*

*1 Corinthians 15:14,17,19*

IN THESE WORDS WE HAVE THE APOSTLE'S ESTIMATE OF THE place and value of that great event which we commemorate today in common with the whole Catholic Church of Jesus Christ. It is a most startling statement, made without apology and without condition. Everything depends upon this one central fact: a risen Christ, or empty preaching and false faith, and a state of abject misery. This man did not think for a single moment that there could be any continuity the Christian fact and force if the resurrection were disproved. Now, we must understand in considering so startling a declaration as this that we do not occupy exactly the same ground as Paul did when he wrote these words. The difference between his position and ours is a very great one in some respects. He wrote these words somewhere about a generation after the death of Jesus. The Gospel stories were not all then in circulation, but men had gone out from Jerusalem through Judea and Samaria, and with new force and power from Antioch to the regions stretching beyond, and as they had passed out they had everywhere told the same story of Jesus of Nazareth, who had lived a sinless life, had died a sorrowful death, and had risen again in power and in glory. A generation only had passed. Consequently Paul's statement in this letter to the Corinthian Christians, who were familiar with questions rife in Corinth concerning the possibility of resurrection under any circumstances, makes its appeal to a generation of experience, and therefrom gathers its greatest force as a challenge. We go back to these words and read them with a slightly different accent. Their essential meaning is not changed, but we are not gathered together at the close of one generation of the telling of the story of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. The generations have multiplied themselves into centuries, and the centuries have rolled onward until nineteen have run their course, and through all of them the messengers have been pressing on, telling the same story with like results. Consequently, there is something less of the argumentative in the text for us than for the men of Corinth. We take these words and read them, and there is but one conclusion. The Apostle says if Christ did not rise, then "preaching is vain"; but preaching has not been vain, therefore Christ was raised. He says, if Christ hath not been raised, "faith is vain"; but faith has been fruitful for nineteen centuries, therefore Christ hath been raised. He says, if Christ hath not been raised, "we are of all men most pitiable"; but we decline the pity. We have marched through nineteen centuries with banners floating and songs lifted, and today we are a jubilant host raising songs of gladness that thrill through all the world. We are not pitiable, and with charity and tenderness, and yet with scorn, we decline the pity of the man who lives in dust and ashes. Therefore Christ hath been raised. If these conclusions are not right, then the Apostle's statement was wrong; he made a false deduction. According to the statement he made, the victory of preaching, the fruitfulness of faith, and the jubilation of the Church are final evidences of the fact of Christ's resurrection. We believe that they are. I submit to you that the surest evidence of actual and positive resurrection from the dead is not documentary evidence, is not argumentative evidence, and I will include in that the sermon I am about to preach. The final evidence is the Church, that holy company of men and women, and, thank God, little children, gathered from among all nations, irrespective of geographical boundaries or temperaments, or times or seasons, gathered as the result of the foolishness of preaching Christ crucified and risen. The supreme demonstration of the fact of the resurrection is in the fruitfulness of faith. Faith has fastened upon the Evangel, with what result? Impurity has perished, and purity has resulted. Selfishness has been smitten to death, and sacrifice has been the order of life. Bonds have been broken, and men have gone forth into freedom. Faith has taken hold upon this Evangel of the resurrection and believed it, and, lo, chains have fallen, the burden has rolled down the hill into the valley, and Christian has set his face toward the Celestial City with a new song and a new victory. The final demonstration of the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the joy of the Church: may I pause to say, alas, and alas, that we give so little of it to the world! We ought to be a singing people. We do occasionally hear people break out into song about their household duties, and in the streets, but all too seldom. One of the greatest curses of our age is that we are afraid that kind of thing is not respectable. Do not ever again hush the emotion that wells in your heart, whether you are in the train or on the street, or wherever you are. It is not that the song is not there, but we have tried to check it with respectability. In spite of all false checks, however, we are a singing people. You talk to me of musical London. There is more singing in the sanctuary than anywhere else. You tell me of the development of music in the history of the ages. There is no music yet quite equal to "The Messiah." When you have sung your Hallelujah Chorus, let there be silence. The Church has given the world its music. We are not pitiable. I claim that these things are the final demonstration of the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Understanding, therefore, that we approach our subject from a slightly different standpoint, having all the added testimony of the passing centuries, I yet desire to take you back to Paul's affirmation, and, if I may, intimate the changed position we occupy by slightly changing the form of his declaration. To indicate the fact that we are looking back rather than that we stand in the presence of a newborn Gospel, I want to consider this theme thus - if Christ had not been raised, what then? Was Paul right when he said that faith would have been fruitless? Was Paul right when he intimated that upon the very children of song there must have come an inevitable sadness which would have made them the most pitiable men in the world? Was he right? I affirm at once that I believe he was absolutely right. Let us think of it for a few moments.

Suppose Jesus had not risen from the dead, what would it have meant so far as He Himself was concerned, so far as His work was concerned, so far as His avowed purpose to build His Church was concerned?

If Jesus Christ had not risen, what would it have meant so far as He Himself was concerned? It would have proved, first, that the greatest claims He ever made were valueless. It would have resulted inevitably in the demonstration of the fact that the work upon which He set His heart in absolute sincerity of endeavour He was utterly unable to accomplish. If Jesus of Nazareth, Whom they "slew, hanging Him on a tree," and Whom, with tender, loving solicitude, some disciples robed for burial and laid in the tomb, never came out of that tomb, what then? Then the greatest claims He made were valueless. I do want to state this carefully. I will not even suggest that the claims He made were false, that is to say, I will not hint that when He made them He did not mean them. I cannot consent to adopt that position even for the sake of a passing argument. But I say they were valueless, and all He meant to do according to His own teaching He failed of in His dying. He said to the crowds when they criticized Him for that first cleansing of the Temple, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They did not at the moment understand Him. The interpretation of His meaning came by way of the resurrection. He said upon another occasion to the cynical seekers after a sign: "There shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet. ... For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." He said upon another occasion, speaking in the hearing of the critical multitudes, "I lay down my life that I may take it again. No man taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from my Father." None of these things was true in issue unless He rose again. According to the appearance of things, if you deny the resurrection, His life was taken from Him by cruel hands that mastered His weakness and hammered Him to the cross with brutal nails, and He never took it again if He never rose. If I had been, which is not at all likely, more patient than His own disciples, I might have waited for the three days to pass, and if the seal had still been upon the tomb and, the Roman cross successful, I should have gone away with agony in my soul. I should have said, He meant to come back, but He is as frail as I am. He is mastered as I shall be mastered. He is beaten. If He did not rise, His own supreme and glorious claims are all valueless.

If He had not risen, what would it have meant concerning Himself and His actual work from the standpoint of the history which has been written for us of those days? When He was crucified all the little company of people that had been gathered about Him left Him. I am not criticizing them; the more I know of my own heart, the less I can do that; I am stating the fact. One disciple betrayed Him, another denied Him, then at the end of three years' public ministry we have the whole tragic story in this one sentence, "They all forsook Him and fled." That is the end of the whole thing - unless He came back. The reverberation of the hammer that drives the nails is the thunder that scatters His followers. They have all gone. The Christian ideal has perished. It was fair and glorious and beautiful. It captured a few hearts and held them, but it is over. He is dead. He is in the tomb. "They all forsook Him and fled," not through lack of love, but because they felt that He could not do the things they had hoped He was going to do. With the death of Jesus the whole movement is at an end. Men are hurrying back to fishing nets, to farming, to sit at the receipt of custom, to hide the shame and disgrace of having associated themselves with a Man, Who, however good, was still a failure. If Jesus had never been raised from the dead, there in Joseph of Arimathaea's garden lay the dust of the fairest dream that ever broke upon the throbbing, surging heart of humanity; but it was past; the whole thing was absolutely over. It was merely that the great dreamer had been murdered, and that is the only meaning of His cross.

We talk of the atonement. We do not perfectly know all its method and its meanings, but we know its victory. Where is the Atonement if this man has gone down to death to abide in death? Where is the proof that in the death grapple in the darkness betwixt old systems and the Word, the Word was triumphant? He hated sin. He claimed to be sinless. He flung Himself against sin. He made other men ashamed of sin; they blushed in His presence, and blanched with fear as the lightning of His denunciation smote them in their hypocrisy. But sin is still rampant. Sin has smitten Him to death. Sin has laid its grasp upon Him and has put Him in the tomb. He is mastered by sin. How can He break my bond, or set me free, or blot out my transgressions? If He rose not, preaching is empty. If He rose not, your faith is vain; you are yet in your sins, held by them, bound by them, mastered by them, damned by them.

If He rose not, His was an ordinary death, and the doctrine of justification is unutterable nonsense. Men often say about existence beyond death, "No one has ever come back to tell us." If He rose not, that is true. There is no certainty of the life beyond if He came not back.

There would have been no justification, and there would have been no song in the cemetery if He had not come back.

If He had not risen, what of the Church? The Church could not have existed. Two things have made the Church. First, the Church consists of a multitude of people who have seen the vision of perfect life. Secondly, the Church consists of a company of people who have received power to enable them to realize the pattern. Jesus was at once pattern and power. Pattern in the glory of His life, power by the fact of His resurrection. If He rose not from among the dead - and now hear me carefully - I affirm that the Church has lost her pattern. Deny the resurrection of Jesus, and I can no more admire the beauty of His life. But you say to me, "Why not? You have already admitted that He may have meant well." Think again. The things He uttered were things in which He, with great distinctness, laid claim to such relationship to God as no other man ever laid claim to. If men murdered Him and He remained under the bands and bonds of death, no more able to break them than other men, then He was none other than other men. We are compelled ultimately to the conclusion that unless He was the Son of God, He lacked modesty, He lacked meekness, He lacked in the deepest fiber of His personality the simple elements of truth. He was the Son of God or the most disastrous deceiver that ever trod the earth. If you put Him in the grave and leave Him there, murdered by other evil men, and never see Him rise again, then He was indeed only man as I am man, and if He was only man as I am man, I repeat, He was the most successful, the most awful, and the most tragic impostor that ever trod the earth. How is He demonstrated the Son of God? By the resurrection from among the dead!

Once again, if Christ did not rise, what did happen? The living Church proves that something happened. What did happen? How were men deceived? I take the Bible up and find the story, and read the things these men affirmed to be true. You say they are not true, that He never rose, that He never presented Himself in that upper room while the doors were closed, that He never stood upon the shore and built a fire and prepared breakfast for cold, tired fishermen, that Mary never saw Him, but that she saw the vision of her own imagination. Tell me, then, what did happen? I have been told that the whole thing was a fraud, that the disciples invented the story to save themselves. But from all earthly standpoints the invention of that story ruined them. If they had abandoned the story they could have saved themselves. All the persecution, all the stripes, all loss and agony came because they would say, "He is alive." I think that needs to be stated today, and to be carefully considered. If the Christians going back to the Temple had said, "We have found a new system, a new ethical teacher, and we propose to form a school around His name," Judaism would never have been angry. It would have taken them in, and there might have been a School of Jesus to this day within the Hebrew economy. Judaism flung them out because they said, "He whom ye slew is alive." I submit to you that they lost everything from the worldly standpoint, and I have yet to be convinced that for nineteen centuries men would continue to suffer pains, imprisonments, loss, agony, death for a lie. Men will occasionally suffer a little while for a lie, but if this thing were a fraud, either cowardice or courage would have declared it ere many years had passed. Cowardice, to escape the scourge, the dungeon and the cross, or courage, as conscience awoke, would have said, "The thing is a lie." The first witness was Peter himself, when, as is chronicled in the fifth chapter of Acts, he stood before the High Priest - who was a Sadducee, believing neither in resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit - and said, "The God of our Fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, hanging Him on a tree. Him did God exalt with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins." And hear him now, "We are witnesses of these things." By which he meant not merely, "We are the men who talk about these things," but rather, "We are His proofs, His credentials, His arguments." He meant to say to the rationalism of his own age, as it was represented by the High Priest, "You have no right to deny the fact of the resurrection until you have accounted for the change that has been wrought in us by our belief in it." When you tell me the story of the resurrection was a fraud, it was a fraud which made men pure and strong, and this is to reveal the absurdity of the charge.

If it was not fraud, what then? To take only one other suggestion, I am told it was a visionary appearance. We are told that people see what they expect to see, and I believe there is a great deal of truth in that. I have been for a great many years looking for a ghost, and I have never seen one. I have not joined the Society for Psychical Research, although I am greatly interested therein. I have read all Mr. Stead's ghost stories. I have walked churchyards at night and seen all sorts of uncanny things, but I have never yet seen a ghost. I will tell you why: I never expected to see one. Some of you who have seen one may pity me. You did expect, and you saw it. That is it. So I am told today by a cheap philosophy that these people saw what they expected to see. They thought about Jesus and hoped to see Him. They thought they saw Him, and there He was. But the facts are against that. They did not expect to see Him. They were startled when they did see Him. The most astonishing thing that ever came to them was the news that others had seen Him, and Thomas was not alone when he said, "Except I see and feel I shall not believe." They did not expect Him. And it was to men not expecting that He came. And it was a man who did not expect who said, "My Lord and my God." The visionary appearance argument does not hold, because you cannot deceive five hundred people with a visionary appearance. If it had been only the women, Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James, Joanna, and Salome who saw Him these latter-day philosophers might have had some ground I hardly like to admit it, but you remember that the two men walking to Emmaus said, "Certain women of our company amazed us ... saying," - and that emphasis lasts until this moment. Yet be very careful how you use the emphasis. Augustine said a very beautiful thing of Mary of Magdala, that she was Apostola Apostolorum, because she was the first sent with the Gospel of the Resurrection. Do not forget this. Sometimes when you are struggling along by logical processes your wife will see the thing long before you. Do not be angry because women see more than you do. But it was not to women only that Christ appeared, but to five hundred brethren at once! Did you ever hear of five hundred people being deceived in that way, and they not for long? But five hundred people at once on a mountain side in broad daylight cannot be so deceived. That idea must be absolutely abandoned.

If you say it was a lie I can at least argue with you, but when you suggest that it was a visionary appearance you make an appeal to a credulity that I do not possess.

I end where Paul ended his argument, "Now hath Christ been raised from the dead." The testimony of the disciples, already referred to, is our first line of proof. These varied appearances, the unequivocal testimony of the witnesses in spite of their own previous unbelief, involving all manner of persecutions, upon the basis of which they suffered, and served, and won, that is the first line of proof, but not the final one. The testimony of Paul himself is also proof. Paul is such a living force today that in one of the most recent books issuing from the more rationalistic side of theological thinking it is suggested that Christianity is more the religion of Paul than of Jesus. I do not quote that as accepting it - I think it is unutterable folly - but to show the influence this man has exerted on the thinking of the centuries. We all know how he sought letters from the High Priest which should empower him to send to prison and death men who believed in the resurrection, and in the Corinthian letter he tells how "last of all, as to one born out of due time, He appeared to me also." One has heard in these recent days that what happened on the road to Damascus was that Paul had an epileptic seizure in a thunderstorm. Supposing that were true, then I should set to praying for epilepsy and thunderstorms at once. Oh, the unutterable folly of it. What changed this man? What made Saul the persecutor, the champion of the old, into Paul the flaming missionary of the new? He saw Jesus and heard Him, and found out that He whom he had thought of as dead was alive, and so forever-more the motto of his thinking and preaching was, "It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead."

The final line of defence is that to which I referred at the beginning - the Church of Christ today. Its very existence demonstrates the fact of the resurrection, or else you have this strange anomaly in human history, a great institution making always for purity born in a lie, for it was the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus that gathered the scattered disciples together.

There is another demonstration of the fact of the resurrection which is personal. Individuals who trust Him share His life, and that life is manifest as it masters them and changes them, until today on thousands of faces wherever you go you may see the very lines of the grace and beauty of the Son of God. There are men and women here tonight by the hundred able to bear witness, and if there were no other, hear me as I speak reverently and make my boast in the Lord - I know He rose, for His life has come into this poor life of mine, and while mine has still much to do, His is already changing it, and forces that harmed are mastered, and new desires, new aspirations, new outlooks are mine. If Jesus were only such as I am, a man who died and passed to it dust in Joseph of Arimathaea's garden, He could not do these things. I can admire the genius of Milton dead, but I cannot share his life and see the vision he saw. I can admire lie very melancholy of Dante, but I cannot see with his eyes. Jesus has come into me, and I have seen the Father to be what Jesus said He was, and my brother to be what Jesus said He was, and the world to be what He said it was. I know that Christ rose, because His life is in me. I am not admiring a dead thinker. I am living and walking and singing in comradeship with the living Christ.

Christ is risen! Our preaching is not vain. Pardon follows it. Peace comes after it. Power results from it. Your faith is not vain. The Living Person is the demonstration of its truth. The proof of pardon is in your heart, though it defy logical statement; the pledge of immortality makes you challenge old death as he rides upon his pale horse. These are the final proofs. Preaching is not vain. Faith is not fruitless. We are not pitiable.

We go back once again in thought to the grave in the garden and look at it that we may believe, that we may preach, that we may sing. Oh, wonderful garden, wonderful grave.

Seals assuring, guards securing,

Watch His earthly prison.

Seals are shattered, guards are scattered,

Christ bath risen!

Now at last, old things past,

Hope and joy and peace begin;

For Christ hath won

And man shall win!

Where our banner leads us

We may safely go;

Where our Chief precedes us,

We may face the foe.

His right arm is o'er us,

He our guide will be.

Christ hath gone before us;

Christians, follow ye!