**VOLUME 1; CHAPTER 16 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE TURNING AGAIN OF PETER by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*From that time began Jesus to show unto His disciples that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up. And Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall never be unto Thee.*

*Matthew 16:21,22*

*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself and walkedst whither thou wouldst; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not. Now this He spake, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He saith unto him, Follow Me.*

*John 21:18,19*

LET US READ THESE PASSAGES AGAIN, OMITTING ALL SAVE THE actual words of Peter as recorded in the first, and those of Jesus as recorded in the second. "Be it far from Thee, Lord; this shall never be unto Thee." "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not. ... Follow Me."

Last Sunday evening I spoke to you on the subject of the sifting of Peter. This evening we turn our attention to our Lord's method in restoring him. Ere we trace the stages in his turning again, I would notice the significance of the two passages we have read. The one reveals the first movement of Peter out of harmony with his Lord, when for the first time Jesus definitely told His disciples that He must needs go to Jerusalem and suffer and be killed, and the third day be raised up. Peter stood in the presence of the announcement astonished and afraid, and instead of following his Lord, though unable to understand Him, he said, "Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall never be unto Thee." The Master immediately rebuked him in the sternest terms, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art a stumbling-block unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men." When I come to the scene at the seashore, and to the final movement in it, I hear Jesus saying to him, "When thou wast young thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not. ... Follow Me." Thus Jesus brought Peter back to the cross, to his own cross. Peter failed in following when his Lord's cross was presented to him. He was restored to following when his own cross over-shadowed his life. Yet there are many stages between that movement out of fellowship and that perfect restoration. This evening, to magnify His grace and to attempt to set forth the patience and persistence of the Lord in seeking after and restoring His wandering ones, I shall ask you to follow me as I attempt to trace the stages of the restoration, for the man turning his back upon the cross is not immediately transformed into a man who consents to the cross and comes presently to glory in the fact that he is counted worthy to suffer shame for his Master's Name. There was much - I speak it very reverently, although the much of human speech is an awkward word to use of the Divine activity - there was very much for the Master to do for this man. While we shall see Peter all through our study tonight, I pray you attempt to fix your eyes, not on him, but on the Lord, marking the method of His mercy and His patience, how He commenced to make a highway home for this Peter, and how He went after Peter persistently until He set his feet once more upon the broad highway of His commandment, and commissioned him to all the toil of the coming years.

Last Sunday evening we were able to trace the downward steps of Peter in the first chapter of Mark 14. In order to follow consecutively the method of the Master's restoration we cannot confine ourselves to one chapter, but shall attempt to follow it by turning to different passages in the Gospel writings. The first to which I shall draw your attention is to be found in Luke 22:31, 32. Here the Master is speaking to Peter, and says to him (and here I very deliberately use the marginal rendering), "Simon, Simon, Satan hath obtained you by asking, that he might sift you as wheat: but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not: and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren." That is the first step in Peter's restoration. The "you" is plural and the reference is to all the disciples: "but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not." That is singular and personal and immediate. This does not mean that Jesus did not pray for the rest, but it is a special word for Peter. While He tells Peter that he, in common with all the rest, has been obtained by Satan for sifting, He singles Peter out because he is especially in peril.

The first step our Lord took toward the restoration of this man then was that of storing up in his mind words which would be of service to him in the days to come. In one flash of light He revealed a most startling situation. A human soul stands between two forces, the forces of evil and of good. "Satan bath obtained thee by asking ... but I made supplication for thee." Satan has been asking about this man. Jesus has been asking about him. Over against the asking of Satan, Jesus has put His own asking. All that will pay for further consideration, and we postpone it. What I now want you to notice is that Jesus told Peter He had prayed for him that his faith should not fail. Was that prayer answered? Certainly. You say, "But his faith did fail." Never. He denied his Lord. Yes, and believed in Him all the time. What did fail? His courage, his hope, his obedience, not his faith in the Person. The faith of the disciples of Jesus never failed. The two men walking to Emmaus had lost hope and courage and confidence, but not faith in Him. They had lost faith, in the sense of having certain convictions about Him weakened, but they had not lost their faith in Him personally. They thought He had been mistaken. They thought He had failed. They said, "We hoped that it was He which should redeem Israel." Their use of the verb "to hope" was in the past tense. They had lost their hope, but they said He "was a prophet mighty in deed and word," and that suggests that they still believed in Him. The faith which saves is not faith in anything heard about Jesus, but faith in Jesus. Peter's faith never failed. His courage failed, his obedience failed, his hope died out; but he never lost his faith in Jesus. I think the hour came when he thought his faith had failed. A great many people come there. But Jesus had prayed for Peter before his denial, before the outward and evident manifestation of the inner heart backsliding. He had taken an advance march against the enemy, had garrisoned the soul of His child against all the sifting of hell. Thank God, that is my Saviour. I hope He is your Saviour, dear heart. So He begins His method of restoration.

In this same 22nd chapter of Luke we find the next step in verse 61. "And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter." Just a look. I cannot interpret it. There was no theology in it. There were tears in it. Have you ever asked yourself quietly when you were alone how Jesus looked at Peter? I think I know how I would have looked at him. I am very much afraid, from what I know of my own heart, that if my bosom friend had denied me in answer to the give and take of a servant girl and the mockery of brutal soldiers just when most needed him, when my life was being sworn away, my look might have been one of anger. Jesus did not look that way. I know He did not. If there be anything of His grace in my heart I might not have looked in anger, but I think the highest thing that could ever have been said of my looking would be that I looked reproachfully at Peter. Do you think Jesus did that? Do you think that day in the judgment hall He looked back where Peter stood by the fire cursing and swearing, and there was something in his look which said, "Peter, is that you? Can you add to my sorrow? Can you help to break my heart?" I do not think He looked like that. I think He was too self-emptied. I do not think there entered into the thinking of Jesus the sorrow caused to Him by His friend's denial. I think His was a look aflame with the pity of God. I think it was a look ineffable in its tenderness, which said to Peter, not, "What sorrow art thou causing Me," but "What sorrow art thou causing thyself?" I think it was a great look of compassion, full of tenderness divine. Over-whelmed with personal sorrow, He forgot His sorrow in pity for the grief which this foolish man was bringing to his own heart. That interpretation may not be correct. Therefore I simply remind you of what happened and ask you to find out when you are alone what the look meant. Of this at least I am sure, that look broke Peter's heart. I do not think a look of anger would have done that. I almost question whether a look of reproach would have done it. But, oh, the pity of those eyes! The unveiling of God's compassion in those eyes! Peter hurried out into the night. He is coming home. A man is always coming home when he quits the world's fire for the dark night in penitence. There are many tears and sighs and dark hours to go through, but he is coming home. My dear man, are you broken-hearted because you have denied your Lord? Have you quit the world's fires? Are you very dark and desolate and lonely in this house tonight? You are on the way home.

What is the next thing? We turn to chapter 16 of Mark's Gospel and find it in the 7th verse. An angel is speaking to the women, and in the midst of his speaking we hear these words: "Go, tell His disciples ... He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you." I am so glad you have Bibles and have noticed the omission. "Go, tell His disciples and Peter." I do not know how much that means to you. Have you ever thought how much it meant to Peter? The message was all wrapped up in two words, one of which was his own name, and the other the little conjunction which linked him to the other disciples - "and Peter." Imagine for a moment, if you can, what Peter had been passing through. Think of the judgment hall where they swore His Lord's life away, and condemned Him to the brutal death on the cross. Think reverently how they had buffeted Jesus and bruised Him: and think all the while, if you would understand it, from Peter's standpoint. Think how they nailed Jesus to the cross, how they watched Him die, and remember that Peter was saying in his heart, "He is dead, and the last thing He ever heard me say was that I did not know Him." May God deliver every man and woman in this house from the unutterable sorrow of losing a loved one, which loved one last heard you say an unkind thing. If you said an unkind word as you left home tonight, get up and go home and put it right. It may become the agony of your life. Think of it in Peter's case. Cannot you hear him saying, "I denied Him with curses, and swore I did not know Him, and He heard me, and He looked, and I have never had a chance to say another word. He is gone. He is dead. Those eyes cannot look at me now. Those lips cannot speak to me. The hand that leaned on me as we walked will never rest on my shoulder again. He is dead." I have sometimes tried to go with Peter through those days and nights after the Lord looked at him, and I cannot help feeling that they were days and nights of unutterable sorrow.

It is the resurrection morning. The women are early there. They have seen a vision of angels, and are coming with swift steps to the disciples. Peter is somewhere among them, on the outskirts. He felt he did not belong to them. They had all run away, but he alone had denied his Lord. The women are delivering their message and Peter is listening with the rest. Suppose the women had said, "We have seen an angel who told us to tell His disciples that He has gone into Galilee, and we shall see Him there." Peter would have said, "That is not for me. He wants to meet the disciples, but I have denied Him. I have cut myself off from the disciples. I have put myself outside." The Lord knew it. The Master of angels, while yet in the spirit world, charges His angel to tell the women to deliver His message to the disciples and Peter. The women come to the disciples and say, "The angel said we were to tell His disciples and Peter." Immediately there is new hope in the heart of that man, or I do not know human nature. I am not sure that the sorrow did not grow. There is nothing breaks a man's heart like the sign of forgiveness. If I have wronged you and you are hard with me, I shall be sorry; but if you are kind to me you will break my heart. Peter is saying, "He has something to say to me. I wonder what." So the Lord has taken another step towards bringing him home. He has sent him a message.

The next step in the restoration is found in Luke 24:33, 34, "And they rose up that very hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen, and hath appeared to Simon." The Lord had revealed Himself to the two men walking to Emmaus, and they hastened back to Jerusalem with the news that they had seen Him, and found the eleven gathered together, and it was the eleven who said, "The Lord is risen, and hath appeared to Simon." I do not know how you are going to place that chronologically. I am not sure whether He appeared to Simon before He walked to Emmaus with the two men, or somewhere in the interim between His breaking of bread with them and their getting back again to Jerusalem. I think probably it was before the walk to Emmaus. When the two men from Emmaus got back to Jerusalem to tell what they had seen they found all the disciples filled with wonder and saying, "The Lord is risen, and hath appeared to Simon." Where He appeared to Simon I do not know. What He said to Simon, I dare not tell you dogmatically. There is no record of it. The fact that He appeared to Simon is chronicled, and it was so important that Paul knew about it, and when he mentioned the appearances which demonstrate resurrection, he included this, "He appeared to Cephas." This is the Lord's next step in bringing Peter home, a private, lonely interview. I am so glad I do not know where it happened. I am so thankful there is no record of what passed between them. There are things which pass between a penitent soul and Christ which no third man ought to hear. When Jesus is restoring a soul He is sure to get that soul alone somewhere, and when all others - apostle; prophets, and teachers - are outside, He will talk with that soul face to face. So He talked with Peter. I wonder if you will be patient while I try to imagine one thing He said to Peter. I am almost reluctant to do it. I would not do it if I had not had some such experience myself. I think, among other things, there would be something like this: "Peter, I told you I must go to the cross." Only you must not imagine that Christ said it as you say to people, "I told you so." It was not said in a triumphant tone, to rebuke him. "You did not want me to go to the cross; but, Peter, I have been to the cross, and by My blood your sins are forgiven." I think He said something like that. I think Peter learned in that private interview the meaning of the cross. I think he felt the virtue of the cleansing blood. I think in that hour Peter found out the folly of his own mistake and the wisdom of his Master's method.

Thus finally we come back to John 21, in which we have the last movement in the restoration of this man. May I remind you of the steps already taken? First, Jesus prayed for Peter. Second, He looked at Peter. Third, He sent Peter a message. Fourth, He had a private interview with Peter; and now, in the story of the events which took place on the shore of the lake, you will find the fifth, sixth, and seventh steps. What is the fifth? He challenges Peter's love. The sixth, He gives Peter back his work and commissions him. The seventh, He puts the cross in front of Peter and says, "Follow Me."

First, He challenges Peter's love. There is such wonderful fitness in all our Lord does, and in all His ways. I know it is an old story. We have often read it, but it will not harm us to look at it once more. There are contrasts and similarities in this story which I think are very wonderful. Peter had denied the Lord in the city. Jesus takes him away from the city, with its rush and roar and all its seductions, to the sea. Peter had denied Him just past midnight. Jesus meets Peter there by the sea in the early morning hour, just when men are beginning to see clearly, and from the boat they looked and saw a stranger on the shore. Peter had denied Him by a fire which Jesus' enemies had built. Jesus builds a fire now for Peter, and calls him to confess Him over that fire. Peter had thrice denied Him. Thrice our Lord calls him to confess. Is there any picture in all the Bible more full of beauty? How does Christ begin? Is this a formal court to which He brings Peter? No. It is an informal breakfast. No ecclesiastical commissioners these before whom Peter is arraigned, but fisher-men with the tang of the sea and the weariness of the night upon them, and the hunger of robust physical health. The risen Christ has built a fire, and cooked fish and prepared bread, and He said to them, "Come and break your fast." He waited on them. You did not miss that, did you? He made them sit down and He waited on them. When they had broken their fast, and the light of the morning was all about them, the fire glowing there, and no sense of chilliness, Jesus looked at His servant and said, "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?" It is somewhat wearisome and academic, yet one must point out the difference between these words translated love. When Jesus asked that question He used a high word, which indicates love upon an intellectual plane. "Lovest thou Me with the love of illuminated intelligence?" That is not what He said, but that is what is in the word. Peter did not use that word but took a lower word, a warmer word, an emotional word. "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I fondly love Thee." Immediately Jesus said to him, "Feed My lambs." Then once again He said, "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?" And still the word is the high word with all the light of God upon it. Peter again got down to his lower word, a very beautiful word nevertheless. "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I fondly love Thee." Peter dared not climb to Christ's high word. Then listen, the third time the Lord came down in great grace to Peter's lower word, and said, "Simon, son of John, fondly lovest thou Me?" That is why Simon was grieved. Not because Jesus asked him three times if he loved Him, but because the third time He descended to the lower word. He did not like His Lord to come down, but he had learned such a lesson that he dared not climb to the high word. "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I fondly love Thee." Did Peter ever climb to the high word? Yes. Read his Epistles. He never uses the lower word, always the high word of Jesus. That morning by the lake he just kept on the level of the love he knew he possessed. Mark the contrast in this man. A little while ago he had said to Jesus, "Thou dost not understand me. Though all should forsake Thee, I will not." Now he says, "Lord, Thou knowest all about me. Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." A little while ago, over the fire the enemies of Jesus had built, Peter had denied Him thrice. Now, in the sunlight of the morning, in the warmth of the fire Christ had built, Peter thrice confessed Him, and every time Jesus restored him to his work, and so brought him back into full and perfect fellowship and communion.

I am bound to stop for a moment to say, in God's name get away from the fires Christ's enemies are building for warmth. He knows how to build fires. There is in your nature no demand that He cannot supply. You want enthusiasm, passion, fire? Let Him build it and kindle it and inspire it. Man, if you go to the world's fires, you will burn your passion out until it is nothing but ashes and dust upon the world's highway. Go to Christ's fires and He will take your passion and make it flame and burn. That seems to me, to be the value of this fire which Jesus built. He is saying to men for all time, "If the morning is chill and you want warmth I can build your fire." So He has called for His child's confession, and has given him back his work by the fire which He Himself has built.

There is one other step. He looked at Peter once more and said, "Follow Me." "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." I think we may interpret that, "When you were young you were your own master, and had your own way, and went whither you would. You made your own choices and decisions. Presently, when you are old, when you most need comfort and help, there is a desolating experience waiting for you, Peter. You will stretch out your hands and another will gird you and carry you whither you would not." John listened, and he understood these mystic sentences better than any other man, so he put in a parenthesis, "Now this He spake, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God." Accepting that word of John as true, when Jesus said these words to Peter He meant to say to him, "When you were young you had your own way. You have been impulsive, girding yourself in great independence; but there is an hour coming when someone else will gird you, and bind you and crucify you." It is as clear a picture of the cross as came to Peter at Caesarea Philippi. But that is not all Christ says. Do not go away and think that is all. "Follow Me." What does that mean? "Peter, you were afraid of my cross. I have endured the cross. I have despised the shame. I have risen from among the dead. I am your Lord and Master. Peter, you are coming to the cross. Follow Me. Come My way. My cross leads to My crowning. Your cross will lead to your crowning. My dark day of shame issued in My glad Easter morning of glory. All the perils of your pathway and its pain but lead you out to the Kingdom and to life. Follow Me." And Peter followed Him. He was not changed into an angel, for the very next thing he tried to do was to interfere about John. "What shall this man do?" He is still the same impetuous, impulsive Peter, but he has heard the supreme word. I take his Epistles up presently and read them and find in all of them the glory of his knowledge of his Lord. I find in all of them his consciousness of the infinite meaning of the cross. I find in all of them his consent to the cross and his abandonment to its claims, and I find in all of them his triumphant, glorious victory.

The Saviour who brought Peter back is waiting for you. How shall I say it? Now the crowd hinders me as it always does. I cannot say it, but thank God that while I am witness of these things so also is the Holy Ghost. Listen now to the voice of the Spirit Who is speaking in your heart. Far away are you? Broken-hearted, disappointed with yourself? You have denied Him and He has looked at you. He sends you a message, He is at your side. He wants to talk to you all alone. Let Him. There has been no cooling of His love, no failure in His faithfulness. Where are you, man? Wandering yet? Are you broken-hearted and disappointed? You have gone very far from Him. You have been very mean toward Him. You have dragged His name in the dust, but still His arm is about you. His hand is on your head, and it is a pierced hand. He presses you to His heart, against His wounded side. Trust Him. God help you to trust Him. At last, by the way of the cross, He will bring you also to the crowning. Is there distance between you and your Lord? Cancel the distance. Get back to Him. His love is stronger than death, mightier than the grave. No waters can quench it, and He loves you. I have no other word to say. God help you to see it for yourself, and to obey it by returning to Him now.