**VOLUME 1; CHAPTER 22 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**ABILITY FOR DISABILITY by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth; and his hand was restored.*

*Mark 3:5*

THE THEME IN THE SERMON IS CHRIST'S ABILITY IN THE presence of inability. Every miracle which Jesus wrought was a teaching, and that because the life of our Lord was unified. His was not a life separated into compartments independent of each other. Upon one occasion He said, "I am the truth," a very significant and remarkable statement made by no other teacher: not "I teach the truth," or "I declare the truth," or "I believe the truth," or even "I hold the truth"; but "I am the truth." In the life of Jesus, in His teaching, in His thinking, in His doing, there were none of the divisions which we are so apt to make. We divide between the secular and the sacred, but you cannot find any such division in the teaching of Jesus. To Him all life was sacred. Everything called by us secular when He touched it was revealed to be sacred. He did not divide His life or His thinking into business, recreation and rest. His whole life was effort homed in the will of God - essential truth. Therefore, whatever He touched, He touched from the same central conviction, and whatever He did, He did under the impulse of the same age-abiding principles. If He dealt with a man on the physical side of His being, He acted in exactly the same way as He would when dealing with a man on the mental or spiritual side. He lived and taught in the power of the fact of spiritual law in the natural world. I do not say, "natural law in the spiritual world" - that is an inversion of order - but "spiritual law in the natural world." All natural things were touched by Him from high altitudes of spiritual perception and spiritual power, and, consequently, whenever I take up the story of His dealing with a man on the physical side of his nature I see flaming through it His method in dealing with men in spiritual need, and therefore all the stories of Christ's dealing with physical disability have been used, and rightly, as illustrations of His method with spiritual need. In that way I take this old and familiar story tonight.

My message is to one particular condition of mind or, I might say, to one particular class of persons. I want to speak tonight to those who are fearful and afraid of committing themselves wholly to Christ because of their profound consciousness of some disability within their own life, and there are hundreds of such. I want to speak to the people who, if one should have to deal with them personally about spiritual things, would say, "Yes," to every declaration concerning the glory of Christ, to every affirmation of His perfect example and His gracious tenderness, and yet when urged to yield themselves to Him would utter some word telling of heartbreaking consciousness, of personal disability, and, consequently, of fear. My message is to the fearful. I do not mean at this moment that particular class of people who are afraid to follow Christ with the fear of cowardice. There are such. It is with another kind and quality of fear that I desire to deal, the fear of the man who says, "Yes, I would like to be a Christian, but I am afraid that I would fail." It is a fear wholly wholesome and to be respected. I say that, not to encourage the fear, for, as God may help me, I want tonight to show you that there is no reason for it, although I respect it. The young man who looks me in the face and says, "I would like to be a Christian, but I am afraid I would dishonour His name in the business house where I am," I respect. "Happy is the man that feareth alway," said the preacher long ago; and he was right. It is the man of caution and of fear, conscious of his own disability, who, if we may but lead him into the true and simple relationship to Jesus Christ, which this little story reveals, will be true to Him, loyal to Him, and will stand against all the storms of opposition. That man is worth helping, worth saving. I want to help him if I can.

Let us try to see this thing as it happened, that we may deduce the spiritual values which lie hidden beneath it. The scene is the synagogue, and, as so often in the life of Jesus, His enemies unconsciously complimented Him. "He entered into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had his hand withered. And they watched Him." Why did they watch Him? "Whether He would heal him on the Sabbath day; that they might accuse Him." I am not now interested in the ultimate purpose of these men, the mean and dastardly watching that they might catch Him and accuse Him. Mark this fact, Jesus came into the synagogue, and there was a man who most likely had been there again and again through weeks and months, perhaps years, at all the Sabbath services - a man whose right hand was withered, and immediately the enemies of Christ linked Him with the most needy man in the crowd. It is wonderful what an accurate sense of Jesus Christ His enemies had. They did not at all expect that He would be interested in the chief seat of the synagogue; but they did expect He would be interested in the one man there who was in direst need - the man whose hand was withered. They linked Him in their thinking with need, and they were perfectly right. Of all the men in the synagogue that this Christ of ours would seek out and attempt to help, that was the one man. If the story is a parable, let us apply it as we go. The one man He wants in this house tonight is the man who is in the direst, sorest need. I do not know where he sits or what his name is, but, my brother, if you are in the grip of some dastardly habit that is paralyzing you, you are the man He is after. He is not half so interested in me just now as He is in you. Blessed be His name - His hand is on me, His ordaining hand, or I dare not speak for Him. But I hear Him saying, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost." We cannot sift this great congregation. Thank God, we cannot! It is not our work. Hear this, my brother, hidden away in the crowd, as you say that your neighbour does not know how evil you are in your heart, how tight a hold habit has upon you - the Master sees you, and you are the man He is after. They linked Him with need. That is the first thing that flashes out of this story.

He knew their thoughts, and was angry with their at-tempt to entrap Him and the hardening of heart which was manifest, but He did not allow their criticism and opposition to interfere with His blessing. I hear Him saying, "Stand forth," and when the man stands in the midst He challenges them as to their attitude. Then I hear Him say to the man, "Stretch forth thy hand," and as I watch in wonder and amazement, "he stretched it forth," and as I look to see the result, "his hand was restored." Three things, then, demand our close attention. First, the command of Jesus, "Stretch forth thy hand." Secondly, obedience of the man, "He stretched it forth." Thirdly, the result, "His hand was re-stored."

Now hear the command, and I want to ask you to do something which is a little difficult. Imaginatively, will you come into this synagogue with me? Let us forget this building and the people who are about us and transport ourselves in imagination overseas and back through centuries. We are in the synagogue watching. Here is the man with the hand withered. I need not attempt to enter into any explanation. I will take the word as it stands, "withered," devoid of power. Paralyzed, if you will; palsied, if you will; but "withered," nerveless, devoid of feeling, unable to work. That is the picture. As you are looking at the man with the withered hand, I want you to keep looking at him; the one thing you must not do is look at the One who speaks to him. I want you, if you will, to turn your back upon Jesus Christ in contemplating this scene. We are back in the synagogue among all the people who were there, without all the accumulated testimony of the centuries to the power of Jesus Christ which is our heritage and inheritance. There is the man with the withered hand. The one thing he cannot do is to use that hand. It is powerless, nerveless, "withered." As I look at him with my back to Christ, I hear Christ say, "Stretch forth thy hand," and in a moment my mind is in revolt against Christ. I say to Him, "What do You mean by telling this man to stretch forth his hand? It is the one thing he cannot do. Are You mocking his impotence? Are You asking him in the presence of these people to attempt the thing which, if he could do, he would have done long ago? This is the man's disability. Why ask him to do the thing he cannot do?" I say to Christ as He stands there, "This thing is impossible, and therefore it is unreasonable."

I cannot say that save as I keep my eye fixed upon the man with the withered hand. Change your viewpoint. Once again let your imagination have play. Stand with me in the synagogue, and, being perfectly familiar with the disability of the man with the withered hand, for you have known him for years, look into the face of the One Who said, "Stretch forth thy hand." There is always a quality in these stories not present in the cold letter on the page. You must always bring into your thinking the fact of the Person of Christ. This is not imagination. It is proved by all the context and all that happened. If you will follow me, let me try to lead you in an attempt to do, not what the critics did, but what the man did. Put yourself in the place of the man for a moment, and look back straight into the eyes of the One Who has said, "Stretch forth thy hand." I dare venture to affirm that if you can do it, if you can imagine the man doing it, if you will forget the spiritual application and see merely the story, you will at once see what I am trying to bring you to. On that day I think I know the things which passed, flash after flash, through this man's mind. The first thing was this, "He says, 'Stretch forth thy hand.' I cannot do it." Then he looked straight back into those eyes, and I think he said in his heart, "He would not tell me to do it if He did not mean something that I cannot comprehend. I cannot do it, but I will do it because He says it. I shall will to do it." I think it is very likely that doubt lurked at the back of his mind while his will prompted obedience, but the will did prompt obedience. That is the important truth. Looking into the face of Jesus, that face which carried its own argument perpetually as all the stories reveal if you read them carefully, the man said in his heart, "I cannot, but I will." It is a strange contradiction, but that is what he said that day in his heart. The moment he said, "I will," to the command of Christ, he began to find the forces that he had lacked pulsating through the nerves that had made no response, and all strength was his, and he stretched out his hand.

Surely the picture carries its own teaching. First of all, it teaches me that when Jesus begins to touch any man's disability his perpetual method is that of bringing the man face to face with the one impossible thing in his life. He does not undertake a case, and undertaking it say, "Now we will not notice the evil thing, we will begin outside it." He goes right to the heart of the paralysis, as it is manifest in the case of the man He is dealing with. I do not know what Christ is saying to you particularly, specifically; but I do know this, He is bringing you face to face with the one thing which has mastered you and kept you away from Him for so long. He does not stay to admire the hand you can use. That is not His business. He draws your attention and concentrates your thought immediately upon the power that is paralyzed.

You say to me, "In this great scheme of salvation is it not true that the whole man is paralyzed?" It may be so, but this is also true, that every man coming to Christ comes at first in his supreme weakness, in one point of supreme difficulty. If I may put the thing from another standpoint, men are kept away from Christ by some one thing, some pride of the eye, or some lust of the flesh, some habit of the life, some desire of the carnal nature, some one thing. If it were possible for all the mists to melt about us tonight, and we who have never yielded to Christ could be seen in the clear light of the absolute truth, it would be found that in every case there is one thing hindering. When Jesus said to the young ruler, "One thing thou lackest," He was not dealing with one case only, but with a case which stands forevermore as the type of those who need Him and yet refuse Him, His method is always that of bringing men face to face with the master paralysis of the life. "Stretch forth thy hand." The one thing you cannot do, do! The one thing you are unable to do at this moment, do that!

So far, all this appears to be not calculated to help, but to affright, the soul. Yet we must begin where Christ begins. Is it some habit which masters you? Christ says, "Abandon it now and forever." Is it someone power that is paralyzed in your life? Christ says, "Use it." You tell me your difficulty is right in the centre of your being, with your will. You have no will power. Christ says, "Exercise your will and abandon yourself to Me by an act of will." Is your hand withered? Stretch it out. That is His perpetual method.

Now notice the obedience. "He stretched it forth." Let us try to see how this happened. I think there are three of the simplest things to be noticed. First of all, there was a deep conviction in the heart of the man that his hand was withered. In the second place, there was created in his mind, somehow, a profound conviction that Christ was not there to mock him, that Christ was there in some way to draw attention to his disability in order to turn it into ability. In the third place, by confession of faith, the man attempted the thing commanded, in obedience to the One commanding, and in the moment when he made that confession of faith by an act of will, he made contact with all the infinite resources of Christ, and there came, like a new dynamic, healing, helping life, and he did the thing he could not do. Again the picture is a parable.

There is no man here who will stretch out his hand in obedience to Christ save upon the basis of a profound conviction of need. If you do not know the withering of your power, if you have never yet felt the grip of habit upon you, if you are still unconscious of paralysis, I do not think I can persuade you to this Christ, at least, not by this address. It is to the man who knows his need that this story appeals. You must begin where this man began.

You have begun there; you are so far toward Christ. You know your need. I am quite willing to drop out of account all the rest of the congregation if I can talk to one man hidden away. You know your need. You say, "One power paralyzed? Why, all my high essential powers are paralyzed. In the grip of one habit? I am in the grip of more than I care to name. Incompetent in one power? My whole life is paralyzed." You know your need. Now I pray you look into the face of Christ and think well of what He has proved Himself equal to do in all the centuries that have passed, and remember this, that what He has been doing He still is doing, and what He is doing for others He waits to do for you. In your heart is a great confidence in His ability to save certain men. Honestly and logically apply that confidence to your own need first. Say, if you will, that you cannot think how He can help you, but remember that He Who has helped scores of cases, hundreds, thousands of cases such as yours, is surely not limited in your lonely case among all the sons of need that the centuries have produced. May there come back to you confidence in His ability.

But neither conviction of need nor confidence in Christ's ability will bring healing. Healing can come only when a man, convinced of need, sure of His ability, obeys His command, and by an act of will surrenders to Him. Obedience determined upon by act of will, then contact is made with Him in His power, and the hand willed to be stretched forth because He commands it becomes the hand made whole as the other.

What was the last thing in the story? The result: "his hand was restored." Matthew tells us that his hand "was restored whole as the other." Here was a change from disease to health, from weakness to power, from uselessness to usefulness. All was wrought in the moment when in obedience to Christ, he did the impossible thing and found the power to do it communicated in the act of his surrender.

Here again the picture is a parable. In the moment in which a man, by obedience to Jesus Christ, abandons himself to Him, and then wills to do the thing he has never been able to do, in that moment, because Christ commands it, he makes contact with Christ's power, and there comes into his life a change more wonderful, more marvellous, spiritually, than was the change wrought in the hand of this man physically, and yet the same in essence. In the moment of your surrender and your obedience you will be changed from spiritual disease to spiritual health, from spiritual disability to spiritual ability, from spiritual uselessness to spiritual usefulness, for in all the withered powers there lie dormant possibilities which can be quickened only by the touch of the life and resources of Christ. Christ's life and resources can touch these powers only as man's will yields to Christ's will and he begins to use the activity of obedience. The moment that surrender is made, power is communicated, and the whole spiritual life is changed. That is the Gospel. It is not an explanation of all the mystery of the process or of the mystery of the communication of life, but that is practically exactly what Christ does for men. How many people there are here tonight who are conscious of spiritual disability, seeing the vision occasionally, but never able to realize it; feeling a passionate desire for communion, for purity, for holiness and spiritual power, yet always mastered by evil things! Before you leave this building tonight Jesus Christ can change your death into life, your disease into health, your blindness into vision, your incompetence into competence, your disability into ability, your "I cannot" into your "I can."

Unless Jesus Christ can do that, He cannot help me, and He cannot help hundreds and thousands of men. What Jesus Christ is waiting to do, and is able to do, and has been doing for men through all the ages, is not to present an ideal to them which they are to imitate, but to communicate life which enables them to realize the ideal they have seen. What Jesus has done is not to give men directions how to use the withered hand, but to communicate power to the withered hand that they may be able to use it under the impulse of indwelling life.

Is there anything else here? It is not written, but I think we may follow the story. What happened to the man afterward? What happened to his withered hand afterward, the hand no longer withered but whole, restored like the other? How can he maintain that hand in strength? I think I see him going away from Jesus that day saying, "Well, this is wonderful. See here, this withered hand is healed. I have not been able to lift anything, and now I can lift things easily. I have not positively felt life in it, and now it thrills with life." Then I can imagine him saying to himself, "I have obtained a great blessing today. I must take care of it." Then I can imagine that he takes that hand - healed, restored, made whole as the other - and carefully wraps it in bandages to preserve it, and places it somewhere in his bosom to take care of it, and keeps it there lest it should be harmed again. You see the folly of the whole supposition. You see the tragedy of the folly if you carry it out far enough. Let a man do that, and the hand will wither again, for life is maintained in strength by use. When Christ gives a man back his power it is not that the man may guard it, but that he may use it. That man will retain the life in its fullness by using it, by taking hold of weights and lifting them; if he is a mechanic, by taking up his tools, by going back to work. That is the meaning of the healing of the withered hand. Man is not to take care of his withered hand by bandaging it, but to preserve it in strength by using it for the thing for which it was first created.

That which we have ventured to add to the picture is also a parable. You say, "There was a time when I saw His face. There was a moment when I came back with my withered powers to the Christ, and in obedience to Him I commenced to use them, and He gave me back those powers; but I have lost them. My hand is withered again. Instead of power there is paralysis, which seems more deadly than of old." How have you lost your power? There may be many ways with which I am not dealing. One way of losing power is that of perpetually attempting to take care of it instead of using it. There are hundreds of people who lose their spiritual power by the very attempt they make to conserve it. I am not at all sure that the churches are not in danger of being filled with weak, nerveless, anemic men and women because they are so forever anxious to deepen their own spiritual life. I am not sure that the perpetual restless hurrying to and fro in the attempt to conserve personal spirituality is not a prolific source of spiritual paralysis. In the physical realm you have known some people who are forevermore carrying round a thermometer and taking their temperature. They have always got their hand on their pulse, and are wondering whether they are quite so well as they used to be. You know these are the people who are never in robust health. If you can make them break their thermometer and get their hand off their pulse and turn out and work, they will be better. What is true in the physical is true also in the spiritual. I want to warn you with all my heart against perpetual spiritual introspection. As Christ gives you new power use it in the world's wide field for Him. Think more of the need of the man who is down than of your own personal need. Think more of the enterprises of your Lord than of your own strength or weakness. Look less in, and more out, and up into the face of Jesus, and take every power Ile gave you when you trusted Him, and get out on to the field in ceaseless, hard toil for Him and His Kingdom. Then your spiritual life is likely to be deepened and strengthened and broadened, and instead of anaemic and sentimental religion, we shall have full-blooded, robust, strenuous Christianity, which will lift the world and help and bless it. Do not put your restored hand into a sling. Use it. That is the meaning of this story.

In conclusion, I go back from that added word, that carrying out of the picture, a little beyond the actual happenings in the synagogue, and bring you to the central thought, for I want to help the man who is afraid. Are you afraid because you know your own weakness? Your fear is wholesome. But now, I beseech you, for one moment take your eyes off your own weakness and fix them upon Christ. If you will do that, then hear Him say, "Stretch forth thy hand," and know this, when He tells a man to do the impossible thing, He does it knowing that He has in His gift all that is needed to help the man do it. The moment you obey He makes over to you the resources of His power.

I may fine down this whole message and bring it to this final word. Take your eyes off your own disability and fix them upon His ability. Doing that, obey Him, and by obeying Him make contact with His power, and you will feel the thrill and force of it and know its result in restoration of lost and paralyzed powers. Do not think of this as a sermon, but as a message to you. There are some here tonight who crossed this threshold with a reverent and absolutely sincere desire to sit in the quiet of the sanctuary and hear some message from on high, yet you know that in your life is the thing that spoils. You hate it as much as any other man hates it - and more; but you feel that it is your master, that it is useless trying. So it is, in your own strength! If you have got as far as that, you are not far from the Kingdom of God. But now, I beseech you, from your weakness look to Jesus' power; from your inability turn to all that He is able to do, and begin again, not to try in your own strength, but to trust and to obey. Though you make no sign of your surrender, if you will do so, in the moment of crisis that waits for you just over the threshold of the sanctuary at the close of the first day of the week, in the moment of crisis that waits for you tonight, you will find His strength made perfect in weakness, and the thing you could not do you will be able to do through Him Who strengtheneth you.