**VOLUME 2; CHAPTER 10 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**"SPARE THYSELF!" by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*From that time began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how 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. But He turned, and said unto Peter, 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. Then said Jesus unto His disciples, if any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*

*Matthew 16:21-24*

THIS CHAPTER CONTAINS A MOST STARTLING CONTRAST between the two conversations of Jesus with Peter. The first is full of light and revelation and gladness. The second is full of darkness and misery and sadness. The first part of the King's mission, so far as the disciples were concerned, was accomplished. The second part was about to begin. He had first of all to teach them that He was the Christ, and at last one of their number had looked into His face and made the great confession. He now had to teach them that the Christ must suffer in order to accomplish the deepest purpose of His mission.

They had thought of the Christ, the Messiah, as of a King who would correct all that was wrong in the externality of things. They had to learn that the method of Christ was not that of beginning at the circumference, but at the centre; not of dealing first with the issues of the sins, but with the sin itself, and that in order to this the process must be one of suffering. He began immediately upon the confession of Peter to tell them that He must suffer and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

I think it is of great importance that we should pay special attention to this statement of Jesus concerning His coming passion. The Son of man must "suffer ... and be killed ... and the third day be raised up." Had He simply said He must "suffer ... and be killed," I might have been inclined to imagine that He spoke as one who merely foresaw the natural issue of what He had been teaching and doing. But He said more than that. He said, first of all, the Son of man "must go unto Jerusalem." He said, finally, the Son of man must rise again. If the foretelling of what His enemies would do to Him was merely the statement of what He knew of them, why must He go to Jerusalem? Why not escape them? That is what Peter asked Him to do. The "must go unto Jerusalem" has in it something deeper and profounder than Jesus' foresight of what His enemies desired to do to Him, for He might have escaped them. The "must go unto Jerusalem" was the result of His loyalty to the will of God, and the impossibility of His deviating from it by a hair's breadth.

Yet it may be said that the "must go unto Jerusalem" leaning back upon the will of God, followed by the must "suffer and be killed," merely meant, I must be true to the will of God, and I now see what the issue will be, these men will kill Me. But when He looks through the blinding mists of the coming passion to the blazing glory of resurrection morning, declaring - "the third day be raised up" - I know He is more than a man submitting Himself to fate. He is a Conqueror moving through battle to victory, through the crisis inevitable, not merely by the will of sinning man, but in the economy of God, to the great and final issue of resurrection and triumph.

The very first recorded word of the Master was, "I must be about My Father's business." He never changed and never deviated. Through teaching and through work, through rebuke and through tenderness, in long journeys and lonely vigils, was always the keynote, "I must be about My Father's business," and as He approached the end, it was the same "must" still. "I must be about My Father's business," and that takes Me to Jerusalem, and that takes Me to suffering, and that takes Me to death, and that takes Me to resurrection.

This morning our attention is to be centred supremely upon Peter, and the effect this new declaration had upon him. Peter taking Him aside, said, "Be it far from Thee, Lord." One wonders whether those words carry to our hearts the real meaning of the thing he said. It was, as a matter of fact, an ejaculation. It has been variously translated. Dr. Young translates it thus - Spare Thyself. I personally think that gets nearer to the heart of Peter's meaning than any other. In the Emphasized Bible, Mr. Rotherham has translated it thus - Mercy on Thee, Lord! It has been translated, God pity Thee, Master! My own feeling is that the introduction of the word God there spoils the real thought and intention. I go back to the word as Young gives it to us, Spare Thyself, Lord! One is almost startled by the vehemence of the Master's reply, "Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art a stumbling-block unto Me," an offense, something in the way, hindering My progress. I must go to Jerusalem and suffer, and be killed and rise again; thou art in the way, a stumbling-block to My going to Jerusalem, to My suffering, to My dying and My rising. "Get thee behind Me, Satan!"

May I now attempt to fix your attention on these two men, Jesus and Peter. We will allow all the other things in this wonderful chapter to stand on one side, in order to see these two. They stand facing each other, representatives of two opposing ideals, one representing humanity according to God's intention, the other representing humanity in the heart and essence of its failure. Both speak in the presence of the eternities, with hearts strangely moved within them. Both speak the deepest thing that is in them. All the surface things are out of sight.

Peter was absolutely honest and poured out in the word he spoke to his Lord his own thought and conception of life and the way it should be lived. Jesus, in His first declaration, and then in His answer to Peter, as clearly revealed His thought and His conception of life, and what it ought to be.

This is a permanent antagonism. So this morning, as I try to take you back to that scene at Caesarea Philippi, I want you, if you will, gradually to forget the rocky fastnesses amid which these things happened, and the different robing of these men of the past, and the different circumstances in the midst of which they lived, and God help you, and God help me, to bring ourselves to the test of this revelation. I am standing this morning with Peter or with Christ. Which? I shall make no confession, but I pray God to find out for me and to show me ere this service be over. May He do so also for you.

First, what is this that Peter said, and what is this that Peter meant? The language of Peter was the language of angry and short-sighted affection. I am very anxious to insist upon it that it was affection. If you are going to put into absolute contrast realizations rather than ideals of life, you must contrast Judas with Jesus. Peter had come far upon the way. He had seen the Lord, and Jesus had said to Him, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee." I want you to see how the highest and the best in humanity, other than Christ, is leagues away from Him. It is Peter who stands in contrast with Christ, the one disciple who had made the confession, the one who had seen the most clearly, and spoken most accurately the truth concerning his Master. It is in this man I find the contrast. His language was that of affection. Lord, pity Thyself. Have mercy upon Thyself. Spare Thyself. And there is infinite pathos in the second part of what he said. Sometimes you may gather a whole tragedy into a word. As Peter said "this," he saw his beloved Master in the hands of the brutal men who had been plotting to take His life. He saw in imagination, keen, awful, accurate imagination, that sacred form battered and bruised, and mauled by the hands of brutal and lawless men. "This shall never be unto Thee." I am inclined to think There were tears in the man's voice, that in that moment his love - and how he did love his Lord - was driving him. This going to Jerusalem to suffer and be killed, this be far from Thee. Peter would not see his Master suffer. That is love, but love intermixed with other things, is paralyzed, blinded, and makes mistakes. Doubt very much, I beseech you, any philosophy which declares to you that love is all, unless that philosophy also declares that God's love contains within it not merely pity and mercy, but holiness and rightness and justness. This word was a word of love, but love mistaken, love not understanding perfectly.

If I have said there were tears in the voice of Peter as he said "this," let me add to that at once: it was indeed the language of anger. The word means to chide. He took Him aside and began to chide Him, to rebuke Him. This does not contradict the other. Love can be angry. Love can speak in tones of bitterness, sometimes when it ought so to do, sometimes when it ought not so to do. Here is a man rebuking His Lord. Pity Thyself. This be far from Thee. This was the language, not of love only, not merely of angry love; it was also the, language of short-sighted love. Is it not remarkable that all through the story of those last days, Christ never spoke to His disciples about the Cross without also speaking of the resurrection. Yet how evident it is that the men who listened never heard, or never understood. When Peter said to Him, Pity Thyself, this be far from Thee, what did he mean? The third-day resurrection? No, the suffering and the Cross. Why did he thus ignore the resurrection? Because he did not perfectly understand, or because he did not take time to think and understand, and because in his own heart's thinking nothing could be considered sufficient to balance suffering and death. It was so all the way through. These men never seem to have heard about the resurrection. It was short-sighted affection. Affection blinded in blood. It was affection which could not see far enough. I am almost loth to take an illustration here, for the subject is high and sacred, yet I think I will. Here is a little child suffering from some form of disease which can be healed and cured by a painful operation. The mother says, Yes; but a friend says, Oh, no. It is a shame the child should suffer. They both love the child, but which loves the child the most? The mother who sees through the pain to the redemption and freedom, and to the lack of pain that lies beyond. Peter loved his Lord. He was angry with his Lord. He was short-sighted. He did not see through to the end of the suffering.

This language of Peter, which was the language of angry, short-sighted affection, expresses the common philosophy of fallen human nature. First of all, the language of Peter indicates man's misconception of the first duty of man. What did Peter mean when he said, Spare Thyself? He meant, Master, your first duty is to yourself. Please forgive me putting Peter's word into so up-to-date a form as that. You have often heard that. You have often said that. A man's first duty is to himself. How constantly we hear it. You hear it inside the Church, among the saints. When you get outside the Church they express the same philosophy in a more brutal way. Each for himself, and the devil take the hindmost. That is a great mistake. The devil generally gets the foremost in that race. That is the philosophy. Master, your first duty is to yourself. Jesus knew that was a lie born in hell. He knew that His first duty was to God. "I must be about My Father's business." That is the first duty.

In the next place, Peter's language, this common expression of the false philosophy of humanity, was a misconception of the value of sacrifice. Peter meant to say to Him, Master, this will be failure, the direst and most disastrous failure. Nothing can be gained by dying. How often you will hear that said. People say, You will kill yourself, and what then? Resurrection and heaven, according to Christ! Defeat, direst failure, and death, according to Peter! Master, I have just confessed Thee Christ, and Thou hast approved my great confession. Master, Thou hast spoken about building a great ecclesia, a Church, and about keys. How are you going to do this if you die? Sacrifice means failure. To hand Yourself over to Your foes, and let them maul, and brutally ill-treat, and murder You, is to fail. I need not argue the other side. Nineteen centuries have proved that by that defeat He won.

He death by dying slew,

He hell in hell laid low.

Peter meant that sacrifice was a mistake.

Once again, this common philosophy of fallen man is a misconception of the value of men. I do not think I do any violence to what Peter meant when I say that in his heart he was thinking something like this - It is the kind of sentiment we applaud. It is the kind of sentiment that still obtains. - I think in Peter's word to Christ this inner thought finds expression, These men are not worth Thy suffering. These men have wronged Thee, they have persecuted Thee, and if they but can, they will lay their hands upon Thee, and put Thee to death. Spare Thyself. I think in the heart of Peter there was some underlying conception that his Master had some purpose of love in being determined to go to Jerusalem, and he said to Him, They are not worth it. Men are not worth suffering for in this way. How much Thou hast suffered, how much of misinterpretation and misunderstanding Thou hast suffered in these days of ministry. Give it up. Pity Thyself. Deliver Thyself from all this. Men are not worth it. Jesus Christ's answer is, that however black the deed of His murder, however dastardly the sin that finds expression in His dying, the men who put Him to death are worth dying for. "I must." It is the "must" of God's will, and the "must" of God's love, and the "must" of God's determination to make it possible that the men who put Him to death should find their way into life.

Now turn to the other side. How will Christ deal with this philosophy and this suggestion? My heart and mind are every day more and more amazed at the Master's method and His wisdom. He first named the origin of the philosophy. "Get thee behind Me, Satan." James Garfield said that what the age supremely needed was men who would dare to look into the face of the devil and call him devil. There was a time when I was somehow hurt, or anxious, that Christ should call Peter, Satan, but I have come to see that His naming of Satan here was out of the compassion of His heart. Peter, I know that voice. I know that philosophy. I have heard that suggestion, not once or twice, but through all the years, and supremely once, in the lonely vigil with which My ministry commenced. In the awful loneliness of the wilderness I heard the voice which said, Pity Thyself, and take the kingdoms of the world by giving me one moment's homage. "Get thee behind Me, Satan." So the real enemy who had been speaking to the King, through Peter, was unmasked.

In the next place, our Lord revealed the true character of the suggestion. "Thou art a stumbling-block," an obstacle to progress, something which will not help, but will hinder. Peter, desirous of helping, was hindering.

Finally, the Master analyzed the motive. "Thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men." Will you put these things into contrast as they stand revealed here for a moment? The things of men, as I see them at Caesarea Philippi, are not vulgar things, not things against which men conduct missions, and institute the signing of pledges. What are the things of men which Peter was minding? Ease, fame, wealth and pomp. These were the things in Peter's view. A king with keys upon his girdle, and his high officers of state. A king more occupied with his own dignity than with the welfare of his people. A king seeking his own ease, his own safety, his own comfort. The things of men, false ideals of human greatness and human royalty. What are the things of God? Peace based upon purity. Rest only after the conflict which destroys the things which create restlessness. Joy lifting itself into song because the fountains of sorrow have been dried up. Glory and honour, not won by the way of compromise, but by the way of fidelity to the eternal principles of right. These are the things of God. If a man is minding the things of men and seeking ease, and earthly pomp, and glory, living a self-centred life, he is against Christ. If he is minding the things of God, the Kingdom of God which cannot be established save as the forces and evil things which have been against it are dealt with and destroyed, he must go to the Cross. By all of which I desire to say that when Jesus said "I must," it was not merely that He yielded Himself unintelligently to the will of God, but that He knew full well that the will of God which marked his pathway through Jerusalem, and suffering, and the Cross to Resurrection, was the good and perfect and acceptable will. We tell each other, and rightly so, that we are to submit ourselves wholly and absolutely to the will of God without questioning. Yea, verily, but why? Because His will must always be will impulsed by love, and by light, and therefore will be of the highest and noblest and best. It is not mere blind submission to mechanical force, this yielding to the will of God. It is reason linked with faith handing the life over to what must be the highest and noblest and best. So it was with Christ. He minded the things of God. We all know the figure of the Potter and the clay. Have we not often done violence to the great figure by looking more at the clay and the principle than at the Person? If you tell me this is the principle of life, that I am the clay and God is the Potter, and you tell me nothing about God, but only that I am to submit myself wholly, absolutely to Him with-out regard to what He is in Himself, I cannot obey. But I watch the Potter at work on the clay. I know the Potter. I know the thought in the mind of the Potter is a thought of love, a thought of beauty and of purity, and I yield, not to the mechanism of a superior force, but to the love that can make no mistake. Peter had not seen this. He had not yet learned it. Presently he will, and I shall see him rejoicing that he is considered worthy to suffer. For the moment he has not seen this, but Christ has. "I must," because I mind the things of God, not merely the purpose and program of God, but the heart and character of God.

As at the beginning, so at the close let me say to you that these two conceptions of life divide us as a congregation into separate camps. I would God that it might be that we are all in Christ's camp; but I am going to find no verdict, to pass no sentence. Hear me: you are living and I am living, answering one of two master principles, either, Spare thyself, or Do the will of God. The first is devilish. "Get thee behind Me, Satan." When Christ has put His measurement upon a thing, I have no appeal, and desire to make no appeal. The other is Christian in the deep, true, profound sense of the word. I must obey the will of God and that always means suffering in a world where sin is. In the presence of sin and in the presence of wrong, those who put the "must" of the Divine will at the centre of their lives and answer it must come after Him, must know something of fellowship with His suffering. You can know nothing of fellowship with His suffering until you have put the will of God as the master passion of your life. You may suffer, but your suffering is not in fellowship with Him while you are persisting in sin. No man living in answer to lust and desire, suffer as he will, is in fellowship with Christ. Let us beware of specious blasphemy. When a man has yielded himself to Christ, when the will of God has become the master passion of a man's life, then if His will means passing down to Jerusalem, and suffering, and death, so be it. I want to make a distinction carefully here. Jesus did not deliberately choose suffering. He did not deliberately choose sacrifice. He chose the will of God, and because suffering and sacrifice lay in that will He chose them; but He did not imagine that He had to seek for the most unpleasant thing and do it. How many Christian people have that idea. How many people have the idea that they must do the thing that is most objectionable in order that they may be in the will of God. That is not Christ's idea. There are some people who carry that to the last extreme, and I hear of hair shirts and tortures for the flesh. Jesus Christ never scourged Himself. Jesus Christ never inflicted pain upon His own physical being. Jesus Christ never deliberately chose mental anguish. He chose the will of God, and when the will of God led Him through infinite and intolerable suffering, then He went. That is the master passion of life.

It is perfectly true that no man has any right to commit suicide. It is perfectly true that no man has any right to use the strength which is God's strength outside God's will; but no other man has any right to come in and interfere between the servant's loyalty and his Master's command. A man must be very careful that it is God's will when he is in the way of suffering. A man must search himself in the midst of suffering as well as in the midst of joy, as to whether it is God's will.

We need supremely today a Church of Jesus Christ, reformed to the pattern of Jesus Christ. I admit that I have said it is not right to choose suffering simply because it is suffering. A man must choose only the will of God; then if it lead through suffering or joy, he must rejoice alike in joy or pain if it be God's sweet will. Yet surely this voice of Peter is heard on every hand today in the Church. Oh that the Church could be brought to the high level of abandoning her comfortable ease and vulgarity, and come after her Lord with the "must" of God driving, then the world would see that the wounded Bridegroom has a wounded Bride, that the suffering King has a suffering army, that the Head wounded and heaped with abuse has in sympathy with Himself the souls that follow Him to do the will of God, even through suffering.

What then? On every cross there shines the light of Easter day. If you will not have the cross, you will never reach the Easter day. If you shun this rugged road of the will of God, you will never come into the far-reaching magnificence of the King's own great new country.

Someone here is suffering in the will of God. My last word to you is this: We come to the green hill. I have not brought you to the green hill as men who need salvation, but as a company of the children of God. You are in the midst of suffering. You might have missed it if you had been disloyal to truth and to your Lord. You might, young man, have had promotion in the world, but you were true, and you are poorer, and you will be all your life. Already upon that life of yours, limited perhaps, and bruised and broken in the will of God, the light of Easter day is shining, and flowers - not the flowers of earth, the grass that today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven - but the flowers of immortality that bloom from the blood of the Cross are in your pathway and upon your brow. So when we get to the Cross we are at the centre of the universe, and all its measurements are the measurements of God. May He help us to see and understand.