**VOLUME 2; CHAPTER 11 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE YOUNG RULER by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*One thing thou lackest.*

*Mark 10:21*

IT SEEMS TO US AS THOUGH JESUS NEVER SAID A MORE startling thing to any man who came to Him than this, "One thing thou lackest." Yet whether the "one thing" be much or little depends wholly upon what it is. Some five or six years ago, in an American city, as I stood upon the platform and gave out my first hymn in a series of meetings, I heard the weak tones of a small reed organ, notwithstanding the fact that there was a very fine organ in the building. Turning to my friend, the minister of the church, I said to him, "What is the matter with the great organ?" He replied, "Nothing." "Why is it not being played?" I asked. "It lacks only one thing, and that is a player," he replied.

One thing lacking! An instrument, fearfully and wonderfully made, constructed to catch the wind and transmute it into music - silent, no harmony, no symphony - why? There was one thing lacking, a master hand to sweep the keys and bring the music out. Which is a parable, helping us to see what Christ meant. "One thing thou lackest."

In order that we may understand what this lack really was, I am going to ask you first to look carefully at this young man. I want to say three things about him. I shall say nothing about his wealth; nothing concerning his position in the nation, except incidentally, for a man's wealth and position are nothing when you are measuring him by the standards of eternity, or looking upon him in the light of spiritual things. Let us see the man as he was in himself.

The first thing I say concerning him is that he was a man of fine natural temperament. This is revealed in his whole attitude toward Jesus Christ. That he was discerning is revealed in the fact that to Christ he said, "Good Master."

He was also a man of courage. He was a ruler, and so belonged to a class which had been critical at the commencement of our Lord's ministry, but now were openly against Him. Notwithstanding this fact, when this man saw goodness, he confessed it, daring to say, "Good Master."

He was moreover, a man of humility, for when he came into the presence of Jesus he knelt. You may tell me there is nothing more in that than the Eastern method of salutation. It was not the method by which a ruler saluted a peasant, even in the East. Peasants knelt to rulers. It was as strange a thing then as it would be for a ruler to kneel in the presence of a peasant in London. Jesus was most evidently, to the seeing of His own age, a peasant. Yet here is a man, who is a wealthy ruler, who dared to kneel in His presence.

At this man, discerning, courageous, humble, Christ looked, and said, "One thing thou lackest."

He was more than a man of fine temperament, he had a clean record. Never allow any man, be he prophet or priest or preacher, to tell you there is any value in pollution. Let no man make you believe there is no value in having a clean record. Even if you are not a Christian man, there is value in it. This man had a clean record. Jesus flashed upon him the light of six commandments from the decalogue, not the first four, which indicate the relationship which ought to exist between man and God, but the last six, which condition the relation of man to his neighbor. "Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor thy father and mother." One light after another flashed upon the inner, hidden, secret life of the man, and he looked back into the face of Christ and said, "Master, all these things have I observed from my youth." Now, it has been declared that this was an empty boast, that this man said to Christ a thing that was not true. I do not believe it. I believe his statement was the simple, honest truth. I believe that standing there, confronting Jesus Christ, and looking into the eyes of incarnate purity, here was a man who was able to say concerning these ancient commandments which forbid a man violating the true relationship between himself and his neighbour, "All these things have I observed from my youth." Immediately the evangelist tells us that "Jesus looking upon him, loved him." I do not mean to infer by that statement that if he had broken the whole six Christ would not have loved him. There is, perchance, a man in this building, hiding away from the crowd, who has broken the whole ten. Christ loves that man, and can save him if he will let Him. It is noticeable, however, that at this point the evangelist declares He loved him. I do not think you will ever find it declared that Christ loved a hypocrite or a liar. There is a sense in which he loved even them, but never in the act of hypocrisy or lying. Christ's anger was white-hot in the presence of all lying and hypocrisy. This young man said, "Master, all these things have I observed from my youth." He was a man of clean record.

Once again, he was a man of true aspiration. What is this question with which he comes to Christ, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Let us be careful here in order that we may catch if possible the real thought in the mind of this man. What is the meaning of this phrase, "eternal life"? We have used it constantly in the Christian Church as though it were a phrase indicating continuity of existence merely. I do not deny that this is partially the meaning of the phrase, but there is much more in it than this. Age-abiding life is what he was seeking. This is not merely life which continues; it is life which contains. It is perfectly evident that in his own soul he was conscious of a present lack. All his wealth could not purchase that something which he needed. He was a man of position, but his position could not command that which his soul was supremely seeking. It was life that he needed, more life that he was seeking. He was conscious of the infinite, and yet could not grasp it. In the midst of all the things of time and sense he heard the echoes of the eternal and spiritual. His clean record did not satisfy him. His power of discernment left him still hungry. His courage had behind it an ache and an agony. His very humility did not bring his inner soul into the realization of that for which it was perpetually asking. He wanted life, he desired to take hold of that which can satisfy the deepest in a man. He heard the call of the infinite sighing its way up through his own nature. He knew he was more than flesh. He knew he was more than that which could be fed with the things which were all about him. Life! Let us state the truth at once. This cry after life is the cry of the lost offspring of God after the Father God. He was seeking God, seeking life, and all this before Christ met him. His meeting with Christ, as we see it in the Gospel narrative, simply brings out into clear relief these facts concerning him, a man of fine temperament, a man of clean record, a man of true aspiration, and to that man Christ said, "One thing thou lackest."

Let us proceed at once to ask what Christ meant. What did he lack? The popular, and I had almost said, the superficial interpretation of the story declares that he lacked poverty. Nothing of the kind. If you leave your story there you have not listened to it, you have not caught the meaning of Christ's strange question at the beginning, "Why callest thou Me good?" If when Christ told this man to sell all that he had and give to the poor, He meant that what he lacked was poverty, then there is no application to the vast majority of us. That surely is not the last word. I am not going to lose that. It has its place in the story. The fact that Christ told this man to sell all that he had and give to the poor is not to be omitted, but it is to be placed in its right relationship. What is the word of Christ to this man? "One thing thou lackest," and then as a preliminary the Master Physician puts His hand upon the one thing that stands in his way. Christ will deal with some of you tonight, but He will not say to you, sell all that you have and give to the poor. He will say something else, put His hand upon some preliminary thing, something, which if you do not abandon you will never be able to obey Him in the ultimate and supreme command. He is moving toward the heart and center of man's need, and it is necessary in doing so to clear out of the way the things that stand between him and the realization of his own life. What is the final word, "Come, follow Me." That is the man's lack. You say to me, Then do you mean to say that what the man lacked was following Christ? Yes, finally, that is what this word really means. Look at it from the standpoint, first of all, not of the Person of Christ, though there we must end, but from the standpoint of the man's real condition. What did this man lack? He lacked a centre of authority. He lacked a dominating principle in his life. He had never found his King.

Will you patiently for a moment keep that statement in mind, while I come a little way from it in order to get back to it. Another of the New Testament stories reveals the principle. A Roman centurion once said, "I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers." When he uttered these words he did not intend to state a principle, but he did so. He was speaking out of the natural order of his own life. Remember, he was a centurion. In that sentence of his is revealed the whole system of true government. "I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers." No man ought to have soldiers under him who is not himself under authority. No man - to put this now, not in its application to soldier life, but to all life - no man can reign who does not serve. No man can wield a sceptre who has not kissed a sceptre. No man can enter into and possess the kingdom of his own life who has not first of all recognized that he is part of a larger kingdom, and has submitted himself to control. "I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers," is a true philosophy of life. This young ruler coming to Christ said, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life," that I may enter into it and possess it, that I may reign in life. Christ said to him, "One thing thou lackest." You have never found your King. You have never bent before the supreme will, even in your religion. In your seeking and your planning you have been self-centred, self-governed. You cannot find life until you have found a King, external and superior to yourself.

Let me take you a little further back for a moment. This man first came to Jesus and said, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why callest thou Me good? None is good, save One, even God." I do not believe that was an idle question. I do not believe that it was spoken carelessly. I think that when our Lord asked the question He desired to arrest this man and to leave an impression upon his mind to which presently He would return. Hear the question, and think of it quite simply. "Why callest thou Me good? None is good, save One, even God." I know there are different interpretations of that question. As a matter of fact, it is one of the sayings of the New Testament which Professor Schmiedel acknowledges to be true, and he tells us it is true because in it Christ evidently discounts Himself, that He evidently meant to say to this man, Do not call Me good. There is none good save God, and I am not God. Did He mean that? Look at the question again. When Christ said, "Why callest thou Me good? None is good, save One, even God," He meant one of two things. He either meant I am not good, or, I am God. I do not think you can escape the alternative. You may escape it by denying the accuracy of the story. If you accept the view that He denied Deity, then if He were true in His philosophy that only God is good, He denied goodness. I do not believe that here Jesus denied good, He denied goodness. I do not believe that He claimed Deity. Looking into the face of this man, He knew that what he wanted was a Master. Man has only one Master, God. There is only one King able to realize the kingdom of human life, and that is God. If a man shall bow the knee to any human teacher, and submit himself to him, he is in peril of his soul, of his very life. There is only one sceptre we must kiss, it is the sceptre of the Most High. There is only one King Who can govern your complex mysterious, far-reaching life, and that is God. When Christ asked that question, it is as though He had said to the man, You are after life. Your discernment is great, because you have linked life with goodness - "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" You come to goodness to inquire the way into life. Why do you call Me good? Think what you are saying. If you have seen goodness in Me, you have seen God. If you have recognized goodness as you have looked into My face, watched My deeds, and listened to My words, your life has come into the light of the Divine, into the light of God Himself.

Presently we read, "One thing thou lackest. Go, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor ... and come, follow Me." That is to say, He confronted this man and said in effect, Fine is the temperament, clean is the record, true is the aspiration, but in order that all these things may be brought to fruition you must find your King Who is God, "Follow Me." He called the man after Himself. This again is one of those stupendous, appalling, overwhelming claims of Christ which either demonstrate Him God in very deed and truth, or prove Him to have been devoid of honesty, purity, and meekness. Standing confronting this man, He says, You need your King. Your King is God. Behold your King. Follow Me!

How is this man to follow Him? What stands in the way? All the things that have ministered perpetually to his own selfish life. Now, says Christ, put them all away. Do not dream for one single moment that if you are really bent on finding your life, and if you are coming after your King, that you can do so by manipulating the things that have ministered to the self life. By drastic, daring, courageous heroism, make an end of them. That is Christ's method with the man, "Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor." There is a touch of fine, sweet satire in Christ's terms, "and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." You will lose your treasure for a moment, and grasp it for the ages. Christ recommends this man to invest his money in such a way that rust cannot corrupt it, and thieves cannot steal it. Postpone the possession to increase it, that is all. Put out of thy life all the things that minister to selfish desire. Be at the end of them. "Follow Me."

What happened? I do not know. Alternatively I do know what happened. The story is left at a point full of sadness, full of suggestiveness. You have no right to say that this man never found his way to Christ. You do not know. This you know, "he went away sorrowful for he was one that had great possessions." "Sorrowful" is the most hopeful word in that statement. I make no dogmatic declaration about the actual issue in his case, but I will tell you absolutely what happened as between one of two things. He had heard the voice which spoke to his inmost heart and soul. From the lips of poverty he had heard the language of the infinite wealth. All the light of spiritual truth flashed and flamed about him, and he knew it. Why was he sorrowful? Tell me, did you ever read anything so strangely contradictory if you measure it by the philosophy of this age or any other age. "He went away sorrowful, because," that is the real force of it, "because he was one that had great possessions." You say, men do not go away sorrowful because they have great possessions. Oh, yes they do, if they have stood face to face with Christ and have heard Him calling them to abandon them, and they do not do it. He had stood in the light and had seen the power of the life which he was seeking. He had come nearer than ever before. For years, I believe, there had been a sighing, groaning, sobbing, agony in the soul of this man after life. He had been close to it, had seen it, had heard its music, had heard its demands, and he went away sorrowful. What happened? One of two things. He got back presently to his own home, a home of ease and luxury, doubtless, for he was a man who had great possessions, a home which in all probability the merchants of Damascus had made beautiful. I see him go back to his own house. I follow him home. There came a moment presently when he said: I can no longer bear it, I have seen life and I must have it. Call in my steward, render an account of my possessions; it is drastic, terrible, I shall suffer lack, but sweep it all out. I must find Him again, the Man of the seamless robe, the lowly Stranger Who looked into my eyes and flashed the very light of life upon me. If he did that, sold all, obeyed Christ, and swept away the power and authority of his past life, he found the age-abiding life. If not, he said to himself, That was a strange thing I did yesterday. I cannot imagine what possessed me to kneel to that peasant. I thought I wanted life, and that He could say something about it - and the conscience says, He did say something about it. But no, it was a mere phantasy. Thus gradually he would argue himself out of the thing. If that were his action, the day came when he laughed at the weakness of the moment when he knelt in the presence of Jesus. Not long ago a Member of Parliament laughed in the presence of a great meeting as he told them that he was nearly born again in a great revival meeting years before. When a man has stood face to face with Christ, as that young ruler had done, it is higher or lower, it is either an ascent by the way of the cross, or a descent by the way of selfishness and luxury and sin. I do not know which it was in the case of this young man. Men tell us that tradition has it that this was Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary. I do not know. It has been said that this may actually have been Saul of Tarsus. I do not know. I do not think so. I know this. From that hour he was never the same. Either the sorrow with which he turned away from Christ was turned into joy when he obeyed Him, and found his life, or else the sorrow passed to numbness and deadness, and he became, to use the terrific word of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, "hardened." That is the one condition of all others against which we need to pray.

My brothers and sisters, the story needs very little application. You tell me it is an old story. It is as fresh as this Palm Sunday. You tell me it is Eastern. It is Western. You tell me it happened long ago. I tell you it is happening here and now. There are those of you in this house who have a fine temperament. I do not undervalue it. Your friends love you. You are generous and kind and discerning, frank and courageous. Some of you have a clean record, so far as the vulgarities of sin are concerned. You have right aspirations. You will not be angry with me if I say that your presence here proves it. You do not come here for entertainment. You have heard the undertone of the eternities in your lives, and you have paused this Sabbath evening for a little to listen once again to a man who will speak to you only of Christ and of your relation to God, and you knew it when you came.

There is in your soul the sob after life. Even now the Christ is confronting you. What is He saying to you? I do not know as to the preliminary. I do know as to the ultimate. I cannot say whether He is telling you to go and sell all you have. I do know that He is saying, "Come, follow Me." He is saying "Go" - but what else, I do not know. You say, I wish you would tell me. I cannot tell you. God in heaven give us two or three minutes of honesty! There is no man here tonight who has not yielded to Christ but knows what stands between him and his Lord. "One thing thou lackest, Go," - and I cannot fill in the gap. If I gave you one illustration, or two or three, what are they in a crowd like this? Scores of men and women would say, These things do not refer to us, therefore we are all right. Listen, not to me, but for the Voice which makes no mistake, "One thing thou lackest. Go - " You know the thing that stands between you and the "Follow Me." What stands between? Right hand? Right eye? Cut it off. Pluck it out. Brother? Sister? Father? Mother? Wife? Child? Man, you know what it is. Fling it out, and then, "Follow Me." Now one would like to begin to preach again. I am not going to. Oh, that "Follow Me." No man ever did it but that he found his own life, found its meaning, found its unfolding, its realization. "Follow Me." Here is my last word to you, my brother, you cannot reign in life until you have found your King. There are no words I have ever heard sung that have rung in my soul more than these: -

Make me a captive, Lord,

And then I shall be free;

Force me to render up my sword,

And I shall conqueror be.

I sink in life's alarms

When by myself I stand;

Imprison me within Thine arms,

And strong shall be my hand.

My heart is weak and poor

Until it Master find:

It has no spring of action sure -

It varies with the wind: It cannot freely move

Till Thou hast wrought its chain;

Enslave it with Thy matchless love

And deathless it shall reign.

My power is faint and low

Till I have learned to serve:

It wants the needed fire to glow,

It wants the breeze to nerve;

It cannot drive the world

Until itself be driven;

Its flag can only be unfurled

When Thou shalt breathe from heaven.

My will is not my own

Till Thou hast made it Thine;

If it would reach the monarch's throne

It must its crown resign;

It only stands unbent,

Amid the clashing strife,

When on Thy bosom it has leant,

And found in Thee its life.

That is the meaning of our story. Anything that stands between you and the crowning of Christ, I beseech you, sweep it away. You will never be just the same again after this hour, but higher or lower, to the throne or to the dungeon, and that of your own choice and action in the presence of the Christ. May God in His great grace help us to crown Him and follow Him and find our life.