**VOLUME 2; CHAPTER 15 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE ALL-SUFFICIENT GRACE by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*My grace is sufficient for thee.*

*2 Corinthians 12:9*

THIS PHRASE FORMS PART OF A STORY IN THE LIFE OF ONE man. It is, however, a great word, revealing a profound philosophy of life, unfolding the deepest truth concerning God; in the knowledge of which life finds the place of peace and rest; and becomes powerful and influential in service. It is remarkable how these words have taken hold upon the heart of humanity. I think that as a general rule it is not wise to differentiate as to the value of particular portions of God's Word, and yet there are outstanding passages which all men seem to know and love. These passages are those characterized by simplicity of statement and sublimity of meaning. This is one of them. "My grace is sufficient for thee." Upon that great word many a weary head has rested; many wounded hearts have been healed by it; discouraged souls have heard its infinite music and have set their lives to new endeavor until they have become victorious. Yet, in common with other passages of a similar quality, I believe that multitudes have been helped and comforted by this word who never have discovered its deepest meaning; for in proportion as the soul trusts in God, God communicates to that soul strength and comfort, even though His promise be not perfectly apprehended intellectually.

All of us, with perhaps some very rare exceptions, accept the truth of these words. If I thus admit that there may be some who are a little doubtful in the deepest of their heart about the strict accuracy of this declaration, I am perfectly sure that such doubt arises from some present sorrow, some overwhelming pain, some deep and profound consciousness of perplexity. It is especially for such that these words are precious. In order that they may see it and know its truth, jet us examine the statement carefully.

May I first of all briefly remind you of what the text does not mean. Perhaps I ought to put that a little more carefully. Allow me to remind you of something which does not exhaust the meaning of the text, though it may be contained therein. This word came to the apostle as a veritable word of God, quieting his life, making all its turmoil pass into peace. It means far more than as though God had said to His child, The circumstances in which you find yourself are very hard and very difficult, and very trying, but I will help you to bear them. It does not for a single moment suggest that the adverse circumstances are outside the Divine government. The meaning of the grace of God here is far profounder, far more startling, and full of comfort. God is not saying to His servant, It is very hard and very difficult, and very trying: if it could have been avoided it would have been better, but seeing that it cannot be avoided, I am with you, I am going to help you, to strengthen you.

Is not that what we have thought this text meant? Even if it meant only that it would be worthwhile trusting it; but that is not the fullness of it, that is not the simplest of it; therefore it is not the sublimest.

The text means this, if I may put it broadly first and then examine the accuracy of the interpretation afterwards. That stake in the flesh, that messenger of Satan, is in My grace. It is part of My method. The stake in the flesh is sent. The messenger of Satan is My messenger. This is not something that is against you, but for you. This hard and difficult and trying circumstance is not something outside My province, My economy, which you must overcome with My help: it is of My purpose, it is in My plan. I am high enthroned above all the powers of darkness, and to the trusting soul Satan himself is compelled to be a means of My grace. All your suffering is in My economy. I have poised in My own hand the weight of your burden and know it. Everything that is imposed upon you is under My control. "My grace is sufficient for thee." It is enough for you to know that what you are suffering is part of My discipline, evidence of My love.

In order that we may see that this is indeed what Paul meant when he wrote this word as being God's message to him, first notice the context. Concerning the apostle's experiences as here described there are a great many questions which I do not propose to answer. It is always unwise to attempt to understand things which we are told cannot be understood. It is not very long ago that someone asked me, half incredulously, Do you really believe that Paul was caught up into the third heaven? My answer was, Certainly I believe it. Well, but how? You do not expect me to know how, when he did not know himself. He distinctly wrote, "Whether in the body, or apart from the body, I know not." The things of which he was perfectly sure were that he was caught up into the third heaven, and that he saw and heard, and that upon his lips the seal of a solemn and necessary silence was set. He did not know how, but he knew the fact.

Again, there has been great curiosity as to what he saw and what he heard, notwithstanding the fact that he tells us he heard things "which it is not lawful for a man to utter." There is a book of the visions of Paul, and we are told that in the house of Saul of Tarsus there was discovered a marble casket in which was a writing declaring the things he saw and heard. I hope and believe we have grown out of all such foolishness as that. They were unutterable things. The value of them was undoubtedly manifest in his afterlife.

Probably the experience came to him at Lystra, for he was there about fourteen years prior to the writing of this letter. They stoned him with stones and left him for dead, and it may be that when the men had left him for dead, bruised and battered by their dreadful stones, the Master caught him up and gave him visions. I do not know. I dare not say that it was so. It may have been so. But how he went, or what he saw, and what he heard are not revealed things; consequently they are not for us. They are among the secret things that belong to God.

And yet again many people are attempting to discover what this stake in the flesh was, and again I say to you that if we were meant to know, that also would have been told us. His word is that it was a stake for, rather than in, the flesh. The thought is really that of crucifixion, of suffering in the flesh, and actual and positive physical affliction. It was a stake for the flesh, and it was a messenger of Satan to buffet. There you have the two ideas of abiding affliction, the thorn, the stake in the flesh, and the repetition of trial, the messenger of Satan to buffet. Physical and mental affliction. Then we are told by the apostle why this stake in the flesh came to him, why this messenger of Satan came to buffet him. It was in order that he should not be exalted overmuch by reason of the revelation which had been granted to him in that great hour when he was caught up into the third heaven and saw and heard things which it was impossible for him to utter. There is a specific purpose, and will you notice that when Paul wrote his letter he knew this.

Then he tells us how he "besought the Lord thrice that it might depart" from him. That prayer was finally answered by the voice of God in his soul, speaking the words, "My grace is sufficient for thee." When the prayer was answered he wrote, "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted overmuch."

While the apostle was praying for the stake in the flesh to be removed, and for the messenger of Satan to be with-held, I do not think he could possibly have written, "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh." When he wrote these words he had come to understand that the thing he wanted to get rid of was part of the Divine purpose for him. The writing of that sentence, "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me," was subsequent to the great answer of the text. The purpose is now clearly revealed, a thorn in the flesh for a specific purpose. His prayer for its removal has issued in his understanding of this fact, that whatever it was, it was sent, given, appointed; that whatever form the buffeting of the angel of Satan took, it was part of God's appointment, something that God Himself had sent to Paul.

But we must get behind to the consciousness of the apostle ere he understood the meaning of the stake in the flesh, ere he understood the meaning of the buffeting of Satan's messenger. There he was, having seen a great vision, yet suddenly depressed by pain and suffering, both physical and mental. Out of the consciousness of his pain, out of the very fierce agony of His suffering, he cried to God and asked that this might be removed from him, that he might be delivered from the stake and from the angel messenger of Satan who buffeted him. To that condition of mind this word of God came, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My power is made perfect in weakness."

Now, notice the effect of the word. "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." It is so easy to read and so difficult to enter into that spirit. "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may cover me." Heart of mine, attend these words. "Wherefore I take pleasure in weaknesses." He does not say, I endure them, I bear them, I suffer them, I am resigned. No, "I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak then am I strong." This is a change from complaint and petition for the removal of these things to a song of triumph in the midst of them, and over them. I see, first of all, a man pleading with great earnestness and great sincerity that he might be delivered from the pain and burden and unrest. Suddenly, I find a man who no longer asks that these things be taken from him, but says, "I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses." I take pleasure in these things, not in the fact that power is given to me to bear them but in the things themselves. I take pleasure in my suffering. I rejoice in my weakness. I sing a song of gladness because of the injury. This is something infinitely beyond the experience of the man who is thankful because God helps him to bear the thing which cannot be escaped. This is the expression of a philosophy that is infinitely removed from that which expresses itself in the words, "What cannot be cured must be endured." Somehow, this man has come to say concerning the thing he wanted to be rid of, I ask no longer to be rid of it, I glory in it! The stake in the flesh is no less painful, but I am glad of the pain. The buffeting of Satan's messenger is no less terrible, but I rejoice in the buffeting. Here is a man who has seen in his pain something of value, who has discovered that the very cross from which he would have escaped is of value, something that he cannot afford to be rid of. "I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses." Notice, he begins with "Wherefore," and the "wherefore" drives me back to the preceding word, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses," and that drives me back to my text. It is this vision of the purpose of the stake and of the messenger of Satan as the apostle declares it, the vision resulting from the word spoken in the text, that sends me back to the text itself that I may ask, What does this mean?

What was it that turned this man's dirge into a song? What was it that changed this man from a good man praying to be delivered from pain into a man singing a song of gladness because he suffered pain? Here is the answer. "He hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee." I submit to you that must mean far more than that God said to him, This thing cannot be avoided, but I will help you to endure it.

Let us take the simple word of the text and look at it. "My grace." What is the meaning of this great word? Who shall answer that question? The word runs through all the New Testament. We see it everywhere, first shining and flaming in revealed glory in the face of Jesus Christ, and then proving to be that root principle out of which the ultimate glory will blossom, the grace of God. Who shall exhaust it? Let us take the word itself. The root idea is that which is pleasing to God. The thought lying at the back of the word is that of the Divine complacency. When grace becomes a river flowing from the throne of God over the life of man it is a beneficent, healing river always, because it is a river which, coming from the throne, accomplishes the will of the throne, and brings into the ordinary life of man the purpose and thought of God which is forevermore a purpose and thought of love. The grace of God. If we accept the old theological definition of the word, that grace is unmerited favor, remember that is only a partial definition. That is the definition of what grace is in activity toward man. Grace exists before it becomes a favor given to anyone. Grace is the fact of the heart of God. You may spell it in the four letters which give you the great word "love." It is essentially the truth concerning God. He is the God of all grace, and we need to remember that as well as to remember that the thing which helps and blesses us is the grace of God. Grace means that which gives pleasure to God, the thing that delights Him, the thing that gives complacency to God Himself. Nothing gives the heart of God pleasure except that which is an activity of love for the blessing of others. God finds His delight forevermore in loving, and in the presence of need, in healing and restoring and blessing, so that the essential grace of God's character becomes a river of healing and of life wherever it flows forth.

"My grace," that which pleases Me, that which comes to you out of My heart, that which reaches you through My love, as a part of its process.

"My grace is sufficient." That is to say the region of the Divine complacency is the region of power forevermore. If a man be where God loves to have Him, he is in the place of power even though at the moment it should be the place of pain.

Let us take two illustrations from the Scripture. I go back to Nehemiah. Ezra had been reading the law of God. Its sense had been given, the interpretation given, the meaning and method explained to the listening people, with what result? The people were filled with sorrow and grief, and the voice of lamentation was raised, and we hear the voice of a people stricken and afflicted. For that there were two reasons: first, the severity of the law, and, second, their consciousness of sin and failure. These people were listening to the law of God - do not miss this - and as they heard it read and explained, they wept and were sorrowful. "Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord; neither be ye grieved; for the joy of the Lord is your strength. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them" (Neh. 8:10). Mark the change. The people heard the law and wept; but when Nehemiah said to them, "The joy of the Lord is your strength," they went away full of mirth. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." Do not let us spoil a great word by superficial exposition. Nehemiah did not mean to say to them, If you will but be happy, you will be strong. He meant to say, Do not be afraid of this law of God. The thing that gives God satisfaction, the thing that makes His heart glad, is your strength - your strength lies in the keeping of His law, and as you give Him joy, you get His joy and so you will become strong.

Take another illustration from the Old Testament of the same great principle, the strange and somewhat startling statement of Isaiah 53:10. "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him: He hath put Him to grief: when thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin. He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand." It is a somewhat difficult passage, and one that certainly cannot be interpreted to mean that God took any personal delight in the suffering of Messiah. "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him" means that it was part of the Divine economy, it was a thing that was necessary, it came into the operations of God, a necessary part of them, that the Son of His love should be bruised, so it pleased the Lord to bruise Him. Out of that bruising came the victory of Messiah so that He prolongs His days and sees the pleasure of the Lord prosper in His own hands. To the Messiah - I say it reverently, and yet it is true, for here we touch the profoundest illustration of our text - to the Messiah the joy of the Lord, which was represented to Him by pain which He endured, was His strength through His realization of the fact that in the midst of the tragedy of His pain He was co-operative with God in the victory by which He leads the long procession of trusting souls into liberty and into light. It was not that He was helped in the Cross to endure something which was outside the Divine economy. It was rather that in the mystery of the Cross He was having the most perfect fellowship with God, dwelling in His pleasure, in His love, in His provision.

To go back from that supreme height of illustration to the actual word of the text, "My grace is sufficient for thee." It is enough for you to know that you are in the place that pleases Me, in the place of My joy, in the place of My appointment. Someone says, I cannot understand how God could be pleased in the suffering of His servant, or how God could be pleased or have joy in the thorn in the flesh and the messenger of Satan. He had such pleasure because He knew that through the process of pain there should come the very power for which His servant was seeking. He had His watchful eye fixed upon the ultimate issue, and He delighted in the processes because of that which was to come out of them. It was that in the great word which He spoke to Paul which turned his dirge into song, his complaint into thanksgiving, his restlessness into perfect peace, without the removal of the actual pain. It was the consciousness that this pain also was part of his Father's tender provision for his own making and his own perfecting which created the comfort of the message, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

Let us now turn from the examination of the text in its context to consider what it teaches us. First is this truth, that "God is love." He is a God of grace, therefore His arrangements for my life are all of love and are all of grace. Every pain that comes to me is a part of His economy, and therefore it is precious pain. The apostle says that the stake in the flesh was given him, that the messenger of Satan was sent not of Satan or of human malice, but of his Father. Until he saw that the pain came from his Father he prayed, naturally and rightly and beautifully, that it might be removed; but when God had spoken in his soul, and he came to understand that the pain also was part of the Divine provision, he sang in the midst of it, he triumphed over it, he rejoiced in it. He made the very suffering the reason for song. Therefore the supreme anxiety of every life should be to be in God's grace, that is, in His will, in His law, in the place that pleases Him. The joy of the Lord, the thing that satisfies Him, is for me the place of my strength whether it be pleasant or painful, rough or smooth, dark or light. Whatever His will appoints is manifestation of His grace, and in that will is the realm, the region, of my strength. Consequently, there should be no anxiety in the life of trusting souls other than that of finding out where God would have us be. The grace of God may be for you, for me, who knows, the stake in the flesh. It may not be that. It may be quite other. The grace of God for some of us is not the thorn, the process that is a lingering agony in the life, but the rose blossoming and blushing in beauty. Do not imagine that God's only method of grace is the method of the thorn. I think it is more often the method of the flower. Do not imagine that God's only method is the method of the storm. I think it is more often the method of the sunlight. I think nature, even in our own land, is often a parable to us of God's method. We are always complaining of the rainy days: but count them and you will find that they are fewer than the sunshiny days. I am not saying we are to seek for pain, that we are to inflict pain upon ourselves. That is the devil's method of stirring up a sensual spirit, not of creating a spiritual sense. God's grace may be a thorn. It may not. It may be cloud. It may be sunshine. It may be a rough pathway. It may be a smooth pathway. It may be through a sea tempest tossed, or it may be by the still waters and through green pastures. The thing we are taught by this word is that the fact that it is His grace is sufficient. I am to rest in His provision, to rest in what He appoints for me, to sing my song, not because I am free from pain, but because He wills that I should be free from pain. If I can sing the song of health and strength and freedom from pain and care, then presently, if for some reason other than I know, He sends me the stake in the flesh and weakness, I shall be able to keep on singing. The reason of man's gladness must be that he is where God would have him be. Delight in your circumstances and they will soon change and your delight will vanish. Delight in the will of God and the darkest day cannot shut out the light from your life.

Reverently let me say this. Suppose before the apostle had discovered this word of God to him, suppose his prayer had been answered and the stake had been taken away, and the messenger of Satan had come no more. What then? When the stake in the flesh was removed and the messenger of Satan came no more, the ministers of God's grace would have been absent. Somewhere in this house there is a broken, bruised soul., Have you, oh, brother, sister mine, been crying out that God would deliver you from this pain? May God help you do learn the deeper lesson. Do not think the preacher is telling you that he has learned it. I do not know that I have, but I am praying God to teach it to me. It may be, dear heart, that in the very pain which is laid upon you is the thing which is making you as nothing else could. Miss Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler, in one of her little poems, reminds us that the gates of heaven are gates of pearl, and she says:

A pearl is found beneath the flowing tide,

And there is held a worse than worthless thing,

Spoiling the shell-built home where it doth cling -

Marring the life near which it must abide.

The everlasting portals are of these,

To teach us that perchance some heavy load -

Some cross 'gainst which so sorely we have striven,

That seems to mar our lives and spoil our ease -

May bring us nearer to the saints' abode,

And prove at last the very "Gate of Heaven."

Do you tell me this morning, dear bruised and broken heart, that your life is spoiled by pain and suffering, physical or mental? God speaks to you and says, "My grace is sufficient for thee." God's fires never harm God's saints. They purify the saints. The pain into which He brings me is pain, a stake for the flesh, actual suffering, a messenger of Satan to buffet and bruise; it is real suffering. "My grace is sufficient." What His will appoints is best. There are many instances of people having prayer answered not for their blessing. I read in the Psalms, "He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul." It is possible to have an answer that is not a blessing.

Jesus lay asleep in the hinder part of the vessel. A storm of unusual violence arose. Even the men who were accustomed to storms were afraid, and they wakened Him and rebuked Him, saying, "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" What did He do? Heard their prayer and answered it. He came to the edge of the boat and looked out over the troubled waters and said, very literally, "Be muzzled." Was not that an excellent thing to do? It was an excellent thing if these men could not climb any higher, but there was something better they might have done. They might have said, Let Him sleep on.

No waters can swallow the ship where lies

The Master of ocean, and earth, and skies.

It is easy to criticize them. Most probably I should have wakened Him, but that does not prove that it would have been right. He rebuked the winds and the waves, and then said to the men, "Why are ye fearful? Have ye not yet faith?" I would rather weather the storm and miss His rebuke. I would rather come through the storm without disturbing Him. I pray Him to teach me the lesson. I want to be able to say, Thy grace is sufficient, and if Thy grace is storm or pain or weakness, then that, and not escape from trouble, is the better way. I would hear His voice saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee," until I can say, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses. ... I take pleasure in weaknesses."

My last word is not to those who are in sorrow, but to those who are not. It is a word I have already said, and I would repeat it with emphasis. Do not say, I cannot be a saint unless I have a stake in the flesh. The philosophy of this text for you is this, that you are to live in the sunshine and sing among the roses. Rejoice, young man, in thy strength. If it is His will that yours should be a flowery pathway, pluck the flowers and live among their fragrance, and when presently the sun is o'ercast and the last rose of summer fades, if you have learned how to abide in His will in the sunshine you will be triumphant in the shadow.