**VOLUME 2; CHAPTER 21 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**WITNESSES by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*We are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Ghost, Whom God hath given to them that obey Him.*

*Acts 5:32*

IN THESE WORDS PETER WAS THE SPOKESMAN OF THE INFANT Church, and he was at once answering a challenge and declaring the solution of a problem. We can appreciate the words at their true value only by remembering the occasion upon which they were spoken. In the context a picture full of life and colour is presented to the mind. Two groups of men are seen confronting each other. They constitute a striking contrast. On the one hand are all the men of light and leading and position in Jerusalem, "the high priest ... and they that were with him ... and the council, and all the senate of the children of Israel." On the other hand are men, not one of them known, save by virtue of their association with Jesus of Nazareth, toiling fishermen of the Galilean Lake, no schoolman in their number, no ruler, no priest. I leave it to your imagination to fill in the details, the magnificent robing of the priest and his friends, the phylacteries, and the faces with that fine expression that tells of culture and of strong and passionate conviction; and, on the other hand, the homespun and simple garments, the rough and rugged splendor of hard-working men, and all the light gleaming from eyes newly illumined.

The high priest has challenged these men, and is strangely perplexed. He has accomplished the death of the troublesome prophet of Nazareth, but a strange story is abroad, told first by the keepers of the grave, and then by the disciples who had been scattered by the crucifixion, that this Jesus is alive, that He has been seen. Of course, he considers it a wild and foolish superstition, but it is having its effect upon both the men who had followed Him in the days of His teaching and those who now heard their preaching. They had flung the ringleaders into prison, and in the morning had gathered together that they might deal with them judicially. The message had come that the prison did not contain the men, but that they were in the temple speaking "all the words of this Life."

And now the apostles stand arraigned before priest and rulers. The priest demands of them how they dare continue to preach in the name of Jesus. Peter speaking here, veritably ex cathedra, on behalf of the whole Church, declared in answer, "We must obey God rather than men." ... "We are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Ghost, Whom God hath given to them that obey Him."

That was an answer to the challenge of unbelief within a few weeks after Pentecost. It is the answer to the challenge of unbelief today, or we have no answer. In this verse there is declared the function and the force of discipleship, the mission and the method of the Church. The function is declared in these words, "We are witnesses of these things." The force is announced in the words, "We ... and so is the Holy Ghost." The mission of the Church, to witness to these things. The method of the Church, to act in perpetual co-operation with the Holy Spirit. Wherever the Church recognizes this as the function and force of discipleship, as the mission and method of her life, the same results follow as followed in Jerusalem. Wherever the Church wanders from this primitive ideal, the early results are wanting. Wherever the Church, and all the disciples that constitute the Church, remember that the main calling of the Church is witness, and that the one and only power of witness is co-operation with the Holy Spirit, then cities are filled with the doctrine, conviction of sin takes hold upon men. The Pentecostal result follows the Pentecostal method.

You will find in this picture, moreover, a contrast of mental attitude. On the one hand we see "the high priest ... and all they that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees)." Who were the Sadducees? I think, perhaps, there is no safer way to answer the question than to take the Bible declaration concerning them. "The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit." These were the men who challenged the apostles, rationalists, men who denied the supernatural element in religion. Resurrection, angel, spirit, they declared to be superstitions of a bygone age. On the other hand, a group of men who testified to the reality of these very things. Said the Sadducee, there is no resurrection. Said the apostles, Christ is risen. Said the Sadducee, there is no angel. Said the apostles, an angel opened the prison doors you shut, and let us out. Said the Sadducee, there is no spirit. Said the apostles, we have entered into partnership with the Holy Spirit. It was the beginning of the long struggle between rationalism and Christianity, the conflict between the affirmation of the spiritual as real and the declaration that there is no spirit, but that man lives merely in dust.

Rationalism is still saying there is no resurrection, not even of Christ; there are no angels, they belong to pictures, to art, and to little children's fancies; there is no spirit, the mind is everything. When you have said psychic, you seem to have said the last word of human intellectuality at the present moment.

On the other hand, the Church is still saying that Christ rose from among the dead; that angels are all "ministering spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation," that men are essentially spirits, and that there is one Holy Spirit of God. These are the declarations of the Church, but how is she to demonstrate the truth of them? The text is answer. "We are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Ghost, Whom God hath given to them that obey Him." Then let us consider these two things, the Church's mission, and the method by which she is able to fulfil that mission.

The Church's mission is declared in that very simple sentence, "We are witnesses of these things." Where do you suppose Peter put the emphasis when he uttered these words? Let me say, first of all, that I am quite sure he did not lay it upon the personal pronoun. He did not say, "We are witnesses of these things." That is where he would have put it before Pentecost, and after Caesarea Philippi. Not so now. The consciousness of personality expressed in the pronoun is lost in the sense of the importance of the witness to be borne. "We are witnesses."

I do not think we have yet reached the point of the true emphasis. I think if we had heard Peter that day speak we should have heard him lay the emphasis on "these things." What things? "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, Whom ye slew, hanging Him on a tree. Him did God exalt with His right hand to be a Prince and Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins." That is the Evangel! Christ is risen. "God ... raised up Jesus": Christ was crucified. "Whom ye slew, hanging Him on a tree": Christ is enthroned. "Him did God exalt to be a Prince and a Saviour": Christ is at work, "to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins." The risen Christ, the crucified Christ, the exalted Christ, the working Christ. "These things." "We are witnesses of these things."

That is the Church's mission. The Church does not exist to entertain the masses. She is unequal to competition with the theatre. The Church does not exist to educate the masses: she must be interested in education, but this is not her supreme vocation. The Church exists to witness to "these things," the risen Christ, the crucified Christ, the enthroned Christ, the living and working Christ. The world does not want the Church. The Church cannot save the world. The world wants the things that the Church testifies of.

Alas, we have been so anxious about the structure of the lighthouse that we have forgotten often to see that the light is burning. We have been quarrelling so busily and with such absolute abandonment concerning forms and garments that we have forgotten the men who wear the garments. We have been more anxious about trappings than about triumph. Find me a man who calls himself a Christian and does not witness to the risen Christ, the crucified Christ, the exalted Christ, the living, working Christ, and he is of use neither to God nor man. Find me a church where the resurrection light is not shining, where the passion of blood is not proclaimed, and the enthroned Lord is not revealed, and the working Lord is not felt, and it is a tomb, an insult to God and to man. "These things," that is the Church's business. "We are witnesses of these things."

Yet let us think of the word "witnesses." A witness is more than a man who talks. Indeed a man may talk and never witness in the New Testament sense of the word. It has been repeatedly pointed out that the word here translated, and translated uniformly throughout the New Testament "witness," is a Greek word which we have anglicized into our word "martyr"; "We are martyrs of these things." What is a martyr? We have come to use the word of such as seal their testimony with their blood. It is a beautiful word for such. When we speak of the "noble army of martyrs," who through flame and fire, through blood and suffering, proved their loyalty to Christ, let us remember that the fires did not make them martyrs. The fires did but reveal them to be martyrs. They were martyrs ere the fires were lit, or they would never have submitted to them. Every day of fiery persecution has been a day when martyrs have been revealed. What, then, is a martyr? He is a confessor. A martyr is one who is first convinced of truth, and then yields his life to the claims of the truth of which he is convinced, and who, therefore, is changed by the truth which he believes, and to which he has yielded himself. So that, finally, a martyr is a specimen, an evidence, a sample, a credential, a proof, a witness. We are the credentials of these things. We are the proof of these things. We say Jesus is risen from the dead. We say the risen Christ is the self-same Christ Who was crucified. We say this Christ is exalted by God. We say this Christ is at work giving repentance and remission of sins. How are we going to prove these things? We are evidences. We prove the accuracy of our doctrine by the transformation of our lives. The apostle did not merely mean, as he stood in the presence of that august company of rulers and priests, that they bore testimony in words, that they were prepared to argue. He meant rather to say, You deny the resurrection; you deny the value we declare to have been created by the dying of this Christ Whom ye slew; you deny that Jesus of Nazareth is on the throne of God; you deny that He is alive and working in Jerusalem! Go back and think of us as we were, and behold us as we are. We are what we are by virtue of the things we declare. It is by the risen Christ Who was crucified, is exalted, and is at work, that we are what we are. Rationalism has no right to deny the accuracy of the supernatural claims of Christ until it can account for the wonders wrought in men and women who by Christianity have been changed from all that is base to everything that is noble, from being slaves to sin into being bond-slaves of Christ, from being men consumed by lust and passion to men consumed by zeal for the salvation of men and for the glory of God.

That is the supreme value of my text as it reveals the work of the Church. The Church confronts the age with living witnesses. If she has none, she is useless. If she has none, she has no argument. If she is not able to present to the age in all its rationalism and unbelief, men and women changed, remade, she has no argument to which the age will listen. Such a declaration as that reacts upon the heart and conscience of every Christian man or woman, or ought so to do. Am I a witness? I do not mean am I a preacher. Unless behind the preaching of my lips there is the testimony of my life, my preaching is blasphemy and impertinence. Unless my own life is changed and transformed and transfigured, a revelation of the fact of the risen, crucified, exalted, working Christ, my preaching is as tinkling brass and a clanging cymbal. So with all of us. Any recitation of creed is blasphemy unless the creed is alive in conduct. Your affirmation of the truth of the Christian facts is impertinence unless in the very fibre of your personality these things are wrought out and are shining through in revelation upon the age. "We are witnesses of these things."

I get back at last to the personal pronoun. "We are witnesses of these things." Who were they? As I have said, none of them counted at all by any of the ordinary standards of human measurement. They were fishermen. Do you not think that term was often used of them disdainfully in those days? These Galilean fishermen! Yet they were witnesses of such things as made them makers of empire, and revolutionaries who turned the world upside down! Not they, but the things through them. The very simplest of the men who answered the claims of the things, and became transformed thereby, became also a force. There is no man here so weak but that if these things are by him believed, and he by them is changed, he becomes appointed a witness in apostolic succession, in Christly fellowship, in actual co-operation with God, a part of the Divine movement for bruising the head of the enemy, and destroying the works of the devil, and bringing in the triumph of righteousness.

They were poor Galilean fishermen, of no account, of no value in themselves, but they live in the imagination of this age, while the priests are remembered by their garments and their phylacteries and their folly.

Yes, but how did they do it? "We are witnesses of these things: and so is the Holy Ghost, Whom God hath given to them that obey Him." The Spirit is witness of the things of Christ. Jesus ere He left His disciples instructed them concerning the days of His absence, and said of the Spirit, "the Paraclete ... shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you. ... He shall bear witness of Me, ... He shall glorify Me." He declared that the mission of the Holy Spirit would be the interpretation of Himself. For the sake of the truth being remembered let me try to condense that great doctrine of the Spirit into two of the simplest of all sentences, so simple that there will be the same words in both, but differently arranged for the revelation of a different value.

The Holy Spirit witnesses of Jesus only.

Only the Holy Spirit witnesses of Jesus.

Think of the first. The holy Spirit witnesses of Jesus only. How we forget it as Christian people! Christian people constantly pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and wait for His coming. In their minds there seems to be the idea that when the Spirit comes to them in fullness they will be conscious of the Spirit. There is no evidence of any such teaching in Scripture. If the Spirit come to us in all fullness, He will make us conscious, not of Himself, but of Christ. "He shall not speak from Himself ... He shall take of Mine and declare it unto you," said Christ.

I would like to stay with that in all tenderness, because I think there are sincere souls being misled by their own thinking in this regard. It is not long since a young man came to me and, said, I do not quite understand my relationship to Christ. I am a little puzzled by it. I have long been praying for the fullness of the Spirit, and waiting for it, and longing for it, and earnestly desiring it. I have heard of others who have received it, but it does not come to me. I began to talk to him, and I found that he thought when the Spirit came in fullness there would be a flash of light and glory, and a thrill and enthusiasm, and consciousness of fire and of the Holy Ghost. It is not so. All the while, through the days, weeks, months of his sincere seeking, this thing had been happening in his experience, Christ was becoming more precious than He was, far more real! The Spirit was there doing His work, unveiling Christ, yet this man did not recognize that the Spirit was fulfilling His one great function. The Spirit comes to witness to Jesus only. Once, tongues of fire and a mighty rushing wind, evidence to the senses of the coming of the Spirit. From that moment, straight on through generations, He has hidden Himself. The Spirit comes to reveal Jesus only. He has no other message, no other work than the unveiling of the face of Christ, in which we see the unveiling of the face of God.

Take my other sentence for a moment and consider it. Only the Holy Spirit witnesses of Jesus. Does this seem to contradict Peter's declaration, "We are witnesses"? By no means. How did they become witnesses? In the hour when they crowned Jesus Lord. Listen, "No man calleth Jesus Lord save by the Holy Spirit." I cannot make you call Him Lord. I can speak of His Lordship, of the perfection of His life, of the passion of His death, of the power of His resurrection, of the program of His reign, and you will hear it all and intellectually consent to the fact that He is Lord, but you never can look into His face and say, "Lord," save as the Spirit of God has unveiled His glory and captured your heart. It is the Spirit of God Who first reveals to the soul the Lordship of Jesus. So these men became witnesses because on the day of Pentecost they had seen Christ as they had never seen Him before. Think of it. They had looked at Christ for three years and had never, never seen Him. They had felt the touch of His human hand and never, never found Him. When the day of Pentecost was come, and the Spirit came as fire and power they saw Him and they became witnesses. Have you seen Him? It is only by the Spirit's unveiling of the face of Christ that He is ever seen, or that men become His witnesses.

When once the Lord has been seen and crowned there is a progressive operation of the Spirit in the life of the believer. The Spirit reveals the Christ to you in some new aspect as you read His Word, as you meditate upon Him, and the moment you see Christ in some new glory, that vision makes a demand upon you. What are you going to do with it? Answer it, obey it, and the Spirit realizes in you the thing you have seen in Christ. Disobey it, and the Spirit has no other message to you until you return to that point of disobedience, and have become obedient. I wonder if you will be patient if for a moment I pass from advocacy to witnessing. I remember with clear distinctness how more than twenty years ago I read a passage in Matthew's Gospel that I had read hundreds of times, but in that moment it flamed and burned before my eyes. It was this, "When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion." I cannot give you what I saw. No man can pass these visions on. You must only hear me patiently, for the lonely vision is for the lonely soul. In that moment to which my own memory goes back, and which lives with me now, I saw the very heart of the Son of God, I saw that compassion as I had never known it, although I had been saved by it. A vision like that is not merely an illumination of the intellect for the entertainment or delight of the soul that sees it. It is a clarion call, a trumpet blast! It said to me - If you are His, and you share His life, you must answer His passion and be willing to follow Him in service which is sacrificial service. Now, let me drop the personal; granted that any man see that as I saw it that night, two pathways open out before him. It is the Spirit's unveiling of the compassion of Christ to the soul. What will the man do who sees it? He can stifle it, admire it merely, and never answer it, until the vision dim and die away, and the Spirit will have no more to say to him. Or he can answer it, give himself to sacrificial service, be willing to die in service, and then the Spirit will lead him further on to higher heights and deeper depths. That is but one illustration. The Spirit is always unveiling Christ. Your responsibility and mine if we would co-operate with Him in witness is that we obey when He speaks. When Christ is seen in a new light, the light is calling you to obey its claim. Answer it and you will become the thing you have seen. Deny it and you will sink to lower levels. This is His method, line upon line, here a little and there a little, grace for grace, beauty after beauty.

Man, you have never seen Christ, nor have I. I have seen something of Him, like a blind man waking to his first vision I have seen men as trees walking. I have seen more and more of the beauty of my Lord as the Spirit has unveiled Him, but I have never seen all the glory. I could not bear it yet. So little by little the Spirit patiently leads us on. Our responsibility is that when light comes we walk in it. When the trumpet call of truth sounds in our souls we must answer it. The Spirit's office - and He never fails - is to reveal Christ. Our duty is to answer the revelation, and when we do so, the Spirit becomes more than illumination, He becomes dynamic and makes us that which we obey.

Soul of mine, answer the light. Obey the Spirit. Do not resist, do not grieve, do not quench the Spirit, and thou, even thou, poor broken man of the dust, shall be made like Him. What is heaven, I pray you tell? Seeing Him and being like Him. To that goal the Spirit leads.

Now hear me as I say this in conclusion. It is when I act in co-operation with this Spirit Who reveals Jesus only, Who only reveals Jesus, that I become His witness. That brings me back to the emphasis I placed a few moments ago upon the word "witness." I pray you now place the emphasis upon "witness" by linking it with that other Witness. The Spirit witnessing in me, I become the instrument through which the Spirit witnesses to the world. Where? Anywhere. When? Everywhen. God deliver us from the heresy of ever imagining that we witness only when we are in the pulpit, from the heresy of imagining that what the world wants is more preaching. Preaching is of no use save as it makes living witnesses. How have I failed, how awfully have I failed, God have mercy upon me, if I have simply held you and interested you for this hour. But if I have sent you back to your office tomorrow, back to your store, back to your home, back to your place in the government, to be more like Christ, I have hastened the coming of the day of God, I have done something to bring the Kingdom in. He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers - to preach men to heaven? No, no! What, then? To perfect the saints to the work of ministering. The truth I preach is of value in the ultimate issue only as it is incarnate in the lives of the men who listen. London is perishing for lack of living witnesses. The world awaits the evangel of transformed, transfigured lives. Will you be a witness? You say, How can I? The answer is in the text, "the Holy Ghost Whom God hath given to them that obey Him." You have looked into the face of the Lord Christ. Intellectually, you have seen Him and have acknowledged that He is Lord. Crown Him. Submit to Him. Trust Him. Do it with something of heroism, I beseech you. Do it with something of daring, I implore you. The influence of the Church is sadly hindered, the world is sadly hindered by dilettante discipleship. Crown Christ. Obey Him. Cut the last shore rope that binds you to the old life. In the moment that you crown Him the Holy Spirit will baptize you into unity of life with Him, and you will become His witness.