**VOLUME 3; CHAPTER 01 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE TRUE FOCUS by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*And I said, This is my infirmity ... the years of the right hand of the Most High.*

*Psalm 77:10*

FOCUS IS ALL IMPORTANT. THIS IS KNOWN TO EVERY person who has looked upon a landscape through a field- glass or has seen its beauties gathered up in a camera. When the instrument is improperly adjusted, the images which it shows are blurred and indistinct; but when, by proper manipulation, the right focus is obtained, how clear, or, to use the technical word, how sharp the picture becomes, with every point clearly and properly defined! So is it with our survey of life. We must view our years from the proper point of vision, or mist and doubt will deceive us.

Reviewing our life, we may look at it in varied ways; but there is only one correct standpoint from which we may do so, and unless we find it there is no explanation of the enigma of life, no vision of things in their true proportion and perspective, nothing is sharp, true, and clearly defined. The life of any man, as he looks back upon it, is perhaps the greatest puzzle which his experience can furnish. His neighbour's life is not so bewildering to him as is his own until he has the right point of vision from which to view it. Sorrows and perplexities, the dispensations of Providence, the new and subtle forms of temptation perpetually appearing, the grief, the anguish, the agony of life, who shall explain these things? What explanation can be found for the mystery of pain, the problem of suffering, and the other dark enigmas which encompass us?

If I can say a word to help some soul who, looking back upon life, finds it shrouded in mist, unshapen and unmeaning; if I can lead that man to a point of vision from which everything shall be sharp, clear, and well defined - the purpose of this sermon will have been answered. In order to do that let me at once say that I believe the one true point of vision is that given in our text: "The years of the right hand of the Most High." For elucidation of this thought we must deal with the text in its context.

This psalm, written by Asaph, is a very remarkable one, and is most clearly divided, as I think the casual observer will have noticed, by the words of my text. The first part of the psalm is of an absolutely different character from the second. When the Psalmist reaches the point where he says, "This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High," the picture is changed completely. The same man is looking at it, but he has suddenly found an adjustment of the lens by which everything comes into focus, and he sees things as they really are. We shall discover how this comes about if we examine the psalm more closely,

The first ten verses contain twenty-two personal references and eleven allusions to God. The personal pronoun I occurs ten times, my nine times, me once, mine twice - twenty-two personal references in all. The Divine name, or pronouns having reference to the Divine, occur eleven times, namely, God four times, Jehovah twice, Thou once, He twice, and His twice.

This is not an unfair analysis of the psalm. A man's true condition of heart, mind, character, and position is never revealed by the creed (written by someone else) which he recites, but by his ordinary conversation, by the unmeasured words that pass over his lips. A man's real life is not revealed in carefully prepared utterances, but in those which fall from him without his knowledge, and upon which he would have put a check if he could. Thus doth Asaph, in the depth of a his grief which is both personal and relative, pour out his complaint. As I hear him I wait for the little words of the speech, disregarding for the moment the great words that tell of his agony and pain, and, lo, personal pronouns come tumbling over each other until they double in number his reference to the Divine.

While the man is in this condition I notice also some of the phrases that fall from his lips. He says, "I will cry unto God with my voice; even unto God with my voice, and He will give ear unto me." Then the first nine verses contain a story of anguish without healing. "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord. My hand was stretched out in the night, and slacked not; my soul refused to be comforted." He sought God in some way which brought no comfort to him. "I remember God, and am disquieted." The memory of God brought him no peace. "I complain, my spirit is over-whelmed." Complaint brings no relief. "Thou holdest mine eyes watching: I am so troubled that I cannot speak." He charges even his sleeplessness upon God. "I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart; and my spirit made diligent search." Thus he goes back to past experiences; but even out of them he can get no comfort. This contemplation of his need issues in a series of questions which is almost a wail of despair, "Will the Lord cast off for ever? And will He be favourable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?"

This is a picture of actual things, but it is out of focus. Asaph has not reached the true point of vision. He is trying to examine his sorrow by taking his stand in the midst of it. He is looking into the bitterness of his own heart, and from his own history he is recalling happy days, only to have the misery of present experience accentuated by the memory of past joyousness and brightness. Sorrow is overwhelming him; and he imagines, in the darkness of his present condition, that God has forgotten him. He asks in the bitterness of his spirit, "Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore?"

Suddenly there is an adjustment of the lens, and how great is the difference! "I said, This is my infirmity," this condition of mind. The words, "But I will remember," do not occur in the original. The Psalmist really said, "This is my infirmity - the years of the right hand of the Most High!" He does not announce his intention to dwell upon them, but he announces the character of the years themselves. It is the suddenness of a quick appreciation of the true view of things.

Do you not know what it is suddenly to adjust a picture, by the slightest touch of the hand, so that the whole thing is seen in its true focus? Yes, you have gained the real point of view. So it is here. From the midst of a God-questioning disposition, in which hope is lost, he suddenly says, "This is my infirmity - the years of the right hand of the Most High!" Now what do you find? The second half of the psalm is the same picture in focus. Apply to it the same test that we used for the first half. How many personal references are found in last half of the psalm? Three only: the pronoun I thrice. How many references to God? Four and twenty: Jehovah once, Thy eleven times, the word God five times, Thou four Thee twice, and Thine once. In the first half the Divine is acknowledged, reverenced, believed in; but the man is overwhelmed with a sense of self and of present grief. In the second half God is the supreme thought in the mind of this man, and self has dropped into insignificance. In the second half of the psalm eight is the multiple of the man's speech concerning God as compared with his words about himself.

I do not propose to enter upon a detailed comparison of the expressions in the second half with those of the first, but is a remarkable change. In the beginning he said, "Hath God forgotten?" Now he says, "Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is a great god like unto God? Thou art the God that doest wonders: Thou hast made known Thy strength among the peoples." This is the man who a moment ago was asking if God had ceased to be gracious, and if there were no more deliverance! You cannot take these two of the psalm and put them side by side without noticing the marvelous difference between them. One is all darkness, the other is all light; one is blurred and indistinct, the other clear and sharp. One is characterized by disappointment, by the experience of a man who has almost lost his hold upon God, the other is the song of a man marching with God to victory against all opposition. How comes the difference? Everything depends upon our text. Suddenly in the midst of Asaph's wailing he is reminded, as we believe by the Holy Spirit, that "this is my infirmity - the years of the right hand of the Most High." Bearing in mind the necessity for omitting the words, "I will remember," we have, as I have said, a sudden adjustment of the picture of a man's life and condition; and that adjustment is brought about by his seeing that the years are from the right hand of the Most High.

The years are not the years of God - God has no years; but they are the years of man's own life. We necessarily and rightly mark off days into weeks, weeks into months, and months into years; but when you speak of God you speak of Him who is and has no years. He teaches us this by the words of inspiration. With Him a thousand of our years are as a day; and one day with Him is, in its infinite possibility, as a thousand years. God has no time.

The Psalmist, then, is here speaking of his own years, the measured portions of his existence. He counts them as they come - one, two, three, four, and on. What are these years? They are the years of the right hand of the Most High, the years that are held within the hand of God, the years that are moulded, conditioned, and made by that hand. Nothing in the years of the Psalmist's own life is outside the hand of God. That is the force of the figure, which does not appear upon a first reading or upon the reading of the text in its isolation.

The old Hebrew thought concerning the right hand of God is full of meaning. In the song of Moses at the end of his life, as chronicled in Deuteronomy 33:2, he speaks of the right hand of God, saying, "From His right hand went a fiery law for the people," showing that the Hebrew mind thought of the right hand of God as a hand of law, of arrangement. In Psalm 48:10 the right hand of God is spoken of as being full of righteousness, so that here we have not merely law, but equity, law based upon that which is just and true. In Psalm 17:7 the psalmist refers to the right hand of God as a right hand of salvation. In Psalm 20:6 the right hand of God is spoken of as His right hand of strength. In Psalm 118:16 the light hand of God is spoken of as His right hand of action. When you come to the Song of Solomon (2:6), God's right hand is spoken of as an emblem of caressing and tender love. And in Psalm 16:11 you have that magnificent declaration, "In Thy presence is fullness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

The right hand is a symbol peculiar to Hebrew thought and literature, and is used perpetually to mark some great fact in the character and person of God. Law and righteousness, salvation and strength, action and love, and the deep, full satisfaction of every necessity of human life, in pleasures forevermore - all these things, to the mind of the Hebrew, were wrapped up in that magnificent figure of the right hand of the Most High. The years of my life, now says the Psalmist, are years conditioned in law and righteousness - years in which there is the perpetual outworking of salvation and the unceasing manifestation of strength; they are years in which God is active for me, years in which I am perpetually caressed by the love and tenderness of the Divine heart, years which, because they come from the hand of God, are years of the making of eternal and undying pleasure. It was a new light upon his own life, a new point of vision, a new outlook. From this new point of vision the things which had issued in his dirge of wailing and sorrow were suddenly seen to be working together for his good, thus giving a forecast of the New Testament statement. The man had caught a glimpse of the explanation of the mystery of today, a glimpse of the outworking into perfect patterns and absolute completeness of the intricacies of the present moment; he had heard his own wail ending in a song of triumph; and all this because he had discovered the fact that his years are from the right hand of the Most High.

Falling back upon our previous statement, that the first half of the psalm and the second are different, and that the difference is wrought by a new vision of life, may we not ask, Wherein does the difference consist?

First of all, self-consciousness is overwhelmed in the sense of God; again, personal suffering is forgotten in view of the divine achievements; and, yet once again, personality is lost in the sense of a God-redeemed society.

Self-consciousness is overwhelmed in a sense of God. One of the most tender, comforting, compassionate methods of God is that which I venture to say you and I never make use of for the comfort of a single broken heart, namely, the exhibition by God of His own overwhelming power and majesty. Again and again is this the way by which God comes with tenderest touch of healing upon broken and bruised hearts. When Job was at the utmost extremity of his pain and desolation God came to him with no word such as I would have attempted to give him, with no word which appeared to have in it the element of explanation or soothing. God came with a display of His own glory. He made His might and majesty to pass before the astonished gaze of the man who sat in the dust; and in that might and majesty of the Most High was the healing which Job so sorely needed. So here Asaph finds his healing and the forgetfulness of himself in a vision of the majesty of God.

Notice the marvellous figurative splendor of the description of the movements of God which you have in the closing verses of the psalm: thunder and lightning, the waters pained, as the Hebrew word expresses it, smitten into agony by the presence of God. This is a graphic picture of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt's bondage and from the waters of the Red Sea. It is the movement of God, the majesty of His march, the magnificence of His power; and as the wounded, broken spirit of Asaph comes face to face with that revelation of power his wounds are forgotten, his sorrow passes away, he is caught up into the excellent and healing glory of the majesty of the great King, and self-consciousness is overwhelmed in a sense of God. If we may but get this vision of the years that have passed from us there will be healing wounds and solace for sorrow in the forgetfulness of self because of an enlarged conception of the majesty of the Most High.

The mightiest influences of God are the most gentle in their touch, and the forces which are most full of majesty and power are the forces that come into contact with wounds and pain in order to heal them. In your knowledge and in mine there is nothing mightier than the sun. The old poetry we learned at school, so simple and quaint, told how the wind and the sun fought for mastery over man. That story of the sun gaining a victory which the wind could not gain has its perpetual philosophy and its undying meaning for the sons of men. The sun, presently smiting the earth upon which the rain and the snow have fallen, will be answered by the hoarded wealth which shall prove that same sun to be the most wondrous of natural forces. Into its light you bring the crushed and faded child which is being nursed back to life, and the kiss of the great sun upon the cheek of the little one makes it also blossom and bloom with beauty. Wounded men and women should not dwell upon their wounds and try to heal them, but should carry them into the sunlight of the majesty of God. They should say of the broken years, the years which are full of pain, the strange, mysterious years. These are the years of the Most High, and upon them shall come the healing of God's uprising in glory.

Notice also how personality is lost in the sense of a God-redeemed society. How different is the last verse of this psalm from the first! The first verse, what is it? "I will cry unto God with my voice; even unto God with my voice, and He will give ear unto me." It is a personal cry. The last verse, what is it? "Thou leddest Thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron." To quote once more from the book of Job, "The Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends." How many an individual wound has been healed in this larger outlook upon life, which can come only as we learn that our years are the years of the right hand of the Most High! We look back upon a year that is past, and what is the picture? I cannot answer for you, nor can you do so for me. Shall we not, each for himself and for herself, think of it?

Are there not moments when, looking back upon the year and thinking of your own part in it, you are almost driven to cry out, "Will the Lord cast off for ever? And will He be favourable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He, in anger, shut up His tender mercies?" How many are saying these things in their hearts, if not with their lips! It is a source of great joy and comfort to know that if we feel these things we need not try to hide them from God. There are expressions with regard to your life which would appear almost blasphemous in the ears of your fellow Christian, but God understands them. I would not say a word to rebuke the anguish and grief that are swelling up in these verses. I dare not. I have no rebuke for such a man or woman, for the soul that has confessed to some awful anguish from which it cannot get away, and is asking, "Has God forgotten?" We must remember that the words of the Psalmist are questions, not affirmations. These words are the cry of a wounded, buffeted, and broken spirit, almost to driven to despair by the perplexing facts and forces of life.

But there is something better than this, something beyond it. "The years of the right hand of the Most High." There is a point of vision from which we may look upon the selfsame things, and may catch on them already the light and gleam of morning, an overwhelming sorrow, saying, Yes, that happened, not upon such a day of such a month in such a year, but in one of the years of the right hand of the Most High. It: was a part of the fiery law, a method of the divine righteousness, a ministry of the divine love; it had within it the creation of joy forevermore. Today we can say these things only by faith, not yet by sight, not yet by personal realization, but by faith. There is no agony of heart that we endure, if we know how to take it, that has not in it the element that shall make heaven.

"The years of the right hand of the Most High." I do not see the hand, I have only the years; but I know the hand is there. I know that somewhere beyond this, when the mists have rolled aside, and the life I am conscious of today shall have passed into fuller realization, then out of the darkness will the light come, and out of the agony of the moment will heaven's pleasure have been evolved. I hardly like to suggest how this comes about; but some of us are already doing so:

Ah, then what raptured greetings

On Canaan's happy shore!

What knitting severed friendships up,

Where partings are no more!

There is a sense in which, today I begin to spell this out, lisping the truth with stammering tongue.

This is but an illustration, but follow me patiently. The year 1894 was a year of His right hand, and there will be more than compensation in the morning of meeting for all the agony of waiting, for I shall see her again, not as a child, but as a fair maiden, in the Father's mansion, grown like Him; and in that transformation there will be all the sweetness which I have lost and missed through the years. The year 1907 was a year of His right hand. I shall see him again, and then the touch of old age will not be upon the brow, but the abiding strength of the age-abiding life. I can only believe it now; but I do believe it. All the years are "the years of the right hand of the Most High." Accidents? There are none. Catastrophes? The word is cancelled in the vocabulary of faith. God's covenant is "ordered in all things, and sure." Oh, strange covenant: perplexing mystery of infinite love wrought out through the more perplexing mystery of pain.

May God teach us His lesson of being still and waiting amid the sorrow. All your affliction, all your sorrow, all your disappointment, in God's hand. Oh, the light of it, the glory of it! We do believe; God help our unbelief, teaching us to wait quietly amid the stress and strain of the darkness.

I cannot see His skies, above,

For autumn mists obscure the west;

But in the shelter of His love,

I fain would hush my heart to rest;

Though some bright hopes have tenderly

Been gathered to their last repose,

This sweet remembrance comforts me -

He knows.

For why the summer came - and went,

He shows not yet to me, His child;

But patience, richer than content,

Broods softly where the summer smiled;

And where the last bright leaf shall fall,

The last pale blossom find repose,

Is safe with Him Who loveth all -

He knows.

Amid the hush of finished things

He hears His children's feeblest prayer,

The tender shadowing of His wings

Extends beyond their utmost care;

And loss that ne'er on earth grows less,

With deep and holy meaning glows,

Since loss, and pain, and homelessness -

He knows,

I cannot tell if cross or crown

Lies next within His thought for me;

It matters not, since faith hath grown

So strong in His dear sympathy;

The clouds that o'er my pathway move,

The joys beyond its final close,

All rise from His deep heart of love -

He knows.

So farewell 1907, and let this 1908 bring with it what it may, two years among the many, which with all the rest are "the years of the right hand of the Most High."