**VOLUME 3; CHAPTER 26 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**CLEAN FOR SERVICE by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Be ye clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord.*

*Isaiah 52:11*

THESE WORDS REVEAL A PHILOSOPHY OF SERVICE FOR THE people of God. They define the responsibility which constantly rests on those who bear His name, that responsibility being indicated in the words, "ye that bear the vessels of the Lord." Moreover, they declare the conditions on which this responsibility may be fulfilled, that, namely, of cleanness in the full sense of that great word.

Bible history reveals the long conflict between two opposing principles, represented by two words, Babylon and Israel; the one standing always for self-centred life, and the other for life which is God-centred.

It is not for us to stay now to trace with any minuteness of examination the conflict between these two principles as it is revealed in the Scriptures of Truth. We may, however, call to mind the landmarks in the case of each. Babel, Babylon, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots. These words serve as indices, and cover the whole movement in the Bible. Over against them we may think of the landmarks on the other side, Abraham, Israel, and Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God for the establishment of the Divine order in the world.

In the first case we trace a movement, based on rebellion against God's government, and issuing at last in uttermost confusion as the great word of the Apocalypse indicates, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great." On the other hand, we trace a movement based on loyalty to God's government and issuing at last in eternal steadfastness. The realization of the Divine order among the sons of men is indicated in that word of the Apocalypse, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples."

Ever and anon in the history of the people of God as recorded in the Scriptures, they are seen yielding to the spirit of Babel, and always as a consequence sharing its confusion. The picture of Jehovah presented, when one takes this outline view, is that of One Who broods over His people, and forevermore attempts to woo them back toward Himself, and He does that because by their complicity with the spirit of BabyIon they injure themselves, and, infinitely worse, because by their complicity with the spirit of Babylon they injure the nations round about them.

In this prophecy of Isaiah, and especially in this part from which our text is taken, we find ourselves in the midst of this conflict, where the two principles are clearly evident. As a matter of fact, at this time Israel, as viewed by the prophet, was in actual captivity in Babylon. Yet there was evident among them a Divine movement toward return to loyalty to God, and consequently toward establishment in their own land. It is impossible to understand this text without recognizing that it forms part of a greater whole. At the fifty- first chapter we have the commencement of the prophet's appeal, "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord." There were among the people of God those who were following righteousness, who passionately desired it, and were seeking the Lord. As we read on we find that the people were aroused as the result of the prophet's appeal, and they lifted a cry to God in these words, "Awake, awake, put on Thy strength, O arm of the Lord." Then we come to the answer of God to the cry of the people. It is found in the opening words of the chapter I read to you, "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion."

The people of God were captive in Babylon. I pray you notice carefully the suggestiveness of it. The people who stood for loyalty to God, and ought to have borne that testimony to the world, were slaves in Babylon, which represented antagonism to the government of God. Yet amongst them in slavery were those in whom was the consciousness of all they were failing to do, and the sigh after something nobler expressed itself in that prayer to God, "Awake, awake, put on Thy strength, O arm of the Lord." To them the answer of God, if I may reverently put it into other words, was this, Why do you cry to me to awake? I am awake. I am not asleep. It is for you to awake and put on strength, and put on your beautiful garments.

Then follows the strange movement which chapter fifty- two describes. The prophet's vision is a remarkable one. He sees the people in their captivity, and he sees messengers crossing the mountains between Jerusalem and Babylon, and the burden of the cry of the messengers to the people in captivity is this, "Thy God reigneth."

It had seemed to these captive people as though God had resigned the throne of government, and they had said, "Put on Thy strength." His answer is, It is for you to put on strength, and the watchman on the heights, and the messengers that traversed the roads between Jerusalem and Babylon cried to the captives, "Thy God reigneth." That cry was answered by a great song of hope, and the people are seen preparing to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem.

At last the call came, "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence." The captives were called to leave the place of captivity and to take their way again to the city of their established government. As they were about to obey, this solemn word was uttered, "Be ye clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord."

They had suffered through the Babel spirit, under the influence of which they had passed. They had passed into captivity to Babylon, because they themselves had bent the neck to the spiritual conception of Babylon. Now revival was beginning in the sigh after God and the proclamation of His continued reign; and they were turning back again to the place of blessing. On the eve of departure the solemn warning was uttered, "Be ye clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord."

Such is the background. In the foreground is this clear enunciation of abiding principle. Those who bear the vessels of the Lord must be clean. Let us then quietly and solemnly consider the two thoughts already indicated; first, the responsibility of the people of God; and second, the condition on which they are able to fulfil that responsibility. That responsibility is suggested in the words, "Ye that bear the vessels of the Lord." The condition on which it is possible to fulfil that responsibility is indicated in the command, "Be ye clean."

This principle of responsibility is enforced from the beginning of Bible history, and has been enforced over and over again by the prophets and interpreters of the ages, and yet, as Christian men and women and as a Christian Church, it is a principle we are always in danger of forgetting. The principle is that the people of God exist, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of the peoples who are not the people of God.

God's people are ever intended to be channels of communication, through whom He may reach others in blessing. Bible history does not exhaust the possible illustrations, but I am content to confine myself within this limitation. The key-word of God's communication to Abraham was this, I will bless you, and you shall be made a blessing. "I will make of thee a great nation … and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." As we watch the building up of that peculiar people - who are today scattered and peeled, but retain with singular and remarkable persistence their national loneliness, even though they no longer have a national constitution \* - as we watch the growth of that nation we see God's method for reaching other nations. Israel today is a people scattered and peeled over the face of the whole earth, because they forgot the meaning of their

\* Written long before the free state of Israel was established in the 20th Century.

making, and failed to understand that they were created, not in order that God might have a people on whom He might lavish His love in forgetfulness of other peoples, but in order that they might become the instrument through which He would reach other peoples. An illustration of the principle outside that of the covenant people is found in this prophecy of Isaiah in the words of Jehovah concerning Cyrus, "I will gird thee, though thou hast not known Me." Trace the history of all national life through the ages and the same principle is discoverable. God makes a nation for a purpose. The moment that nation becomes self-centred, there comes disaster; He destroys the nation He has made. As the nation He makes realizes its responsibility for all the rest He maintains its strength.

The principle is most remarkably manifest in the life of the Church of God. The Church is the depository of the treasure of God for the race. The Church of God is not an institution which holds within itself treasures for its own enrichment. Said the great apostle, whose peculiar phrase, "my Gospel," referred to the Church, "I am debtor." I am in debt to men. In what did his debt consist? In that he had received the great evangel, in that he had perfect understanding of the provision of the grace of God for men, wrought out into his own experience. Not for his saving only was he saved, but in order that he might be the instrument through which God might reach other men for their saving.

To the Church is committed a threefold responsibility. She stands for the manifestation of God to the world. She exists for the reconciliation of the world to God. She has within her fellowship the living means of grace. Some of you may say that is very high-church doctrine. It is the highest of the high, because it is the New Testament doctrine of the Church. She stands first for the manifestation of God. Hear this great word of the New Testament, "Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of Him Who called you." In other words, the Church exists to manifest God. Not through the Word alone will the world find the Father, but through the Word incarnate in the lives of people who have been obedient to it. Only through those who share His nature can His name ever be known.

We bear the vessels of the Lord. The world can find its way to the Saviour only through the Church. Do not misunderstand me, I mean through the Church's proclamation of this Evangel. If you take the widest outlook you see at once what I mean. He cannot reach the heathen people save through the contact with them of His own people. I am neither attempting to discuss the economy of God or to account for it. I declare it as a fact revealed and demonstrated by experience. The world is not waiting for salvation because God is unready to save, but because the Church is not wholly at His disposal to carry the message of salvation. Knowledge of God can come to men finally, fully, completely, only through the Church. He has committed to us the responsibility of revelation. We bear the vessels of the Lord.

The ministry of reconciliation is ours. We fulfil it by the revelation of His love, the revelation of the meaning of His atoning work, and the revelation of the power by which He remakes humanity. All these things are committed to the Church, and men can know them only through the Church.

The means of grace are committed to the Church, the inspired Word for its interpretation, the sacred activities of worship for explanation, and, infinitely more, and without the more these things are of no avail, that service of pity and of power which brings life to the dead, love to those who are lonely, and light to such as sit in darkness. All the treasures of God are deposited with the Church. I do not mean any organized ecclesiastical system, but the whole Catholic Church, made up of men and women who share the life of Christ and walk in the light He brings. We bear the vessels of the Lord.

The one message of God is that of love. God's love message is, that because He: seeks the highest good of man He is the implacable foe of sin. All the vessels of the Lord under the old economy symbolized this truth, and called for the perfection of humanity. The ministry of the Church in the world is with this end in view, that the works of the devil should be destroyed, and the ideals of God realized.

To go back again to the simplest statement of the truth. The world can find God only through His people. Or let me make that statement in quite another form. The only use God has for His people in this world is that the world may find Him through them. The Church of God exists today for the bearing of the vessels of the Lord, for the revelation of the truth concerning Him, the opening to men of doors to fellowship with Him. The great deposit of the Church creates the great responsibility of the Church.

Let us hear what this text suggests to us concerning the conditions on which the Church may fulfil her responsibility. We need to hear them because a statement such as this must bring to us consciousness of our own failure. You speak to me of the indifferent city. I tell you the reason for it is the faulty Church in the indifferent city. We cannot realize our responsibility without knowing our failure. With that thought in mind let us listen to what the prophet said concerning the conditions on which the responsibility may be fulfilled. "Be ye clean." It is a very, very simple word. It is a very searching word. The word itself of which the prophet made use is suggestive. Its first intention is that of clarifying through and through. It is a word which suggests the idea, not of water, but of fire; not of something which deals with the external, but of something that searches through and through. I have been very interested in tracing through the whole of the Old Testament the use of the word here translated clean. The result of that survey is this: I find that it is never used of merely ceremonial cleansing. There are other words used in that sense, but this one never. It always has reference to moral cleanness. When the psalmist says, "The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath He recompensed me"; "Therefore hath the Lord recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in His eyesight"; "With the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure; and with the perverse Thou wilt show Thyself froward," he in each case uses the same word. Perhaps the verse that helps us most to see the force of this word is that mystical and symbolic word in the Canticles,

Who is she that looketh forth as in the morning,

Fair as the moon,

Clear as the sun,

Terrible as an army with banners?

Clear as the sun, that is pure as the sun, clean as the sun if you so will, and the figure of that verse explains the real thought of the word "clean"; it means clarified as with burning heat. "Be ye clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord." Be ye of that fire nature in which no imperfect or impure thing can live. Be ye of that nature which consumes the unworthy, and purifies that which is worthy. Be ye of the very nature of God Himself, of Whom it is written, "Our God is a consuming fire." The great picture of the testing of the Church's work in the Corinthian letter comes to mind in this connection: He shall try our work as with fire. If you will allow your imagination to help you, look at the great picture of the Christ which is given in the Apocalypse by the seer of Patmos, "His eyes are a flame of fire." With eyes of flame he glances over the work of the Church. With what result? Watch the work. Some of it is burnt, destroyed; it shrivels and becomes dust, and is gone; all that is hay, wood, stubble. Some of it loses only its dross and flashes in beauty as the fire of His glance rests on it; all that is gold, silver and precious stones. These are the things that live in fire. These are the things of the fire nature, even though when you touch them they seem to be cold. They are fire nature, for fire cannot destroy them. In the ancient prophecy is this remarkable word, spoken to the king of Tyre, "Thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire," stones that live in the midst of fire.

If we read the word, "Be ye clean," as though it referred only to some ceremonial cleansing, and inculcated certain ceremonial ablutions, we have not caught the force of the prophet's meaning. You bear the vessels of the Lord. You are to be responsible for His revelation to men. You are the people among whom He has deposited the truth for which the world is waiting. "Be clean," be clarified as by fire, be such men and women as that there is nothing in you that fire can destroy. Be such men and women that all the things fire can destroy are destroyed in your own life. "Be ye clean." Our word "clean" may mean so little when it ought to mean so much. That great Hebrew word of which the prophet made use, which is used with such marked carefulness in all the language of the seers and psalmists of long ago, is a word which suggests cleansing in its profoundest sense: cleanness from complicity with Babylon. You have been in captivity to Babylon. You are sighing after the higher and nobler. "Thy God reigneth." God is calling you back to the place and position of power. Leave Babylon behind you when you turn your back on Babylon. Do not carry with you as you come again to the place you have lost any of the spirit that destroyed you before. The emblems of the holiness of the Divine government must be borne by holy men. "Be ye clean."