**VOLUME 4; CHAPTER 07 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**SHINING FACES by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*It came to pass, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tables of the testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the Mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone by reason of His speaking with him.*

 *Exodus 34:29*

THIS VERSE HAS OFTEN ATTRACTED THE PREACHER, AND naturally so. Almost invariably the attraction has been that of its declaration, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone. This also is natural and proper, for that is the main statement. The verse, from the purely literary standpoint, seems to blunder cumbrously on its way to that main declaration. But these very apparently awkward repetitions are of great importance, and, in proportion as we grasp their significance, the main statement will become the more arresting and suggestive.

First and obviously, there is declared in this verse the fact of which Moses was unconscious - that his face shone as he came down from the Mount. Then there are the words in which the writer, undoubtedly Moses himself, accounted both for his ignorance and for the shining of his face, and the very repetitions constitute an emphasis which commands attention.

As to the actual shining of his face, he carefully explains the secret of it - "by reason of His speaking with him." He had been dealing with God, and the glory which consequently suffused his spirit shone from his face.

My purpose is to consider the story that is contained in the verse, in order that we may deduce from it some principles of permanent value, and apply them in the simplest and most commonplace realm.

In the story there are two phases. Of these the first is found last in order of statement. It is contained in these words: "The skin of his face shone by reason of His speaking with him." The second phase is contained in the earlier part of the text: "When he came down from the Mount with the two tables of the testimony in his hand, when he came down from the Mount, Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone."

We are all familiar with the traditional picture of Moses that represents him with two horns or beams of light, for beams of light constitute the significance of the horns. In all probability, that traditional picture of Moses was due to a confusion between two Hebrew words. There is a Hebrew word which signifies irradiation, a general illumination; another Hebrew word signifies to shed forth beams of light. The second of these words is used to describe a sunrise, from the view-point of the rays of light which shoot up the eastern sky. The other word describes rather a general irradiation and illumination. There is no question at all that this latter word is the true word in our text, and not the one that suggests beams of light. The fact thus declared, then, is that Moses' whole face was irradiated in a strange and a wonderful way, in an unusual manner, in a way in which those familiar with him had never seen it irradiated before. His face was transfigured; it was metamorphosed. Just as on the Holy Mount the disciples saw the Face of Jesus transfigured, metamorphosed, made radiant as the shining of the sun in his strength; so in the case of Moses what men looked upon, and looked upon with wonder, was a strange new outshining of glory, through the very form and features of the face with which they had become familiar. The deep secret of that outshining was that the spirit of the man, strange and newly illuminated and suffused with light, mastered in a new way his physical countenance. The material passed under the mastery of the spiritual, and there shone and flashed from his face a new and strange and wonderful glow.

Such an experience is by no means uncommon on lower levels. We have all seen it, more or less often, in the course of our lives, and in hours of communion with our friends. The face of a mother is often transfigured as she looks upon her child. The face of that mother is very plain and common-place usually; but I have never seen a picture of the Madonna so beautiful as the actual face of some mother brooding and crooning over her bairn. We have seen the same transfiguring of the human countenance in the case of true love, in the shining eyes and face of a man, in the love-lit eyes and face of woman. It has been seen again and again in the history of the world on the face of the martyr. They looked upon the face of Stephen, and it was as the face of an angel, for the light of the spiritual joy transfigured the physical countenance. Over and over again high heroism in the place of difficulty transfigures the face of a man until it flames and flashes with the courage of a god. That is what men saw, in a superlative degree, as they looked at Moses on that particular day. He came down from the Mount and they looked, and saw his face shining with a mystic light.

Moses himself in this verse declares the reason of that shining;, "The skin of his face shone by reason of His speaking with him." It is very important that at this point we should have these pronouns rightly allocated. The effect produced, this transfiguration of his face, this illumination, this irradiation, was not the result of Moses talking to God; it resulted from God talking to him.

Let us try to see the occasion. In those wonderful days Moses ascended the Mount of God six times, and this was the last descent.

He had first been called to the Mount, and God had uttered to him words of the great covenant which He proposed to establish between Himself and His people, that they should be to Him for a people of His possession. Descending from the Mount, Moses had declared the words of the covenant, and the people had consented, saying, "All that the Lord hath spoken unto us we will do."

On the occasion of the second ascent, God had spoken to him in other language: "Lo! I come unto thee in a thick cloud"; and had commanded him again to descend and to set a fence about the mountain, and to warn the people to sanctify themselves, to stand apart in awe, aloof from that mountain. Going down, Moses had carried out these injunctions, and separated the people.

Again he had ascended the mountain, for the third time, to receive a further command as to the necessity for the sanctification of the people and the separation of the Mount. The third descent was to obey, and thus to make more sure the awful fact of separation between God and the people.

Then came the fourth ascent. Taking up with him Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders, they saw God, and were not consumed. Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu and the seventy elders retired, and Moses was left alone with God for forty days, in the course of which he received the Law, and the pattern of the ceremonial worship and ritual. Then came the fourth descent. He came down from the Mountain bearing two tables, upon which the Law was written. The golden calf had been created; and Moses, hot with righteous wrath, dropped and broke the tables of the Law.

Then came the fifth ascent. Moses went back, bearing the sin of the people upon his heart, and prayed one of the greatest prayers recorded in the Bible. He prayed that God would spare the people, and, if in no other way, that He would blot his name out of His book that the people might be delivered. In that strange and mystic hour of communion, Moses dared to ask that God would reveal Himself to him in some new way. Then it was that God told him that no man could look upon Him and live, but that He would hide him in some cleft of the rock, making His glory pass by him. The fifth descent was a return to prepare two new tables in obedience to the Divine command.

Then he ascended for the sixth time. During the period of his last presence upon the Mount, God wrote again the Law upon the two new tables, and made Himself known to him in a way in which He had never made Himself known before.

We may cover all the ground that is necessary for our present understanding of that revelation by saying that Moses had revealed to him by these words of God, that mystery of the merging of mercy and judgment in the Divine character, and in the Divine being. In words that throb with tenderness, even as we read them, the character of God is revealed as to the compassion of His heart. In words that are still vibrant with the thunder of His holiness, His character is revealed as to His holiness; He could make no terms with sin. With the strange new sense of God upon his soul, Moses bowed his head and worshipped. In response to that worship, God repeated in that hour of communion the terms of the covenant between Himself and His people, and re-uttered the words of the Law which had already been given.

In proportion as we apprehend the mystic wonder of that wonderful hour upon the Mount, we begin to understand the experience of Moses. That new spiritual illumination was so mighty, so powerful, that it irradiated his countenance.

So we come to the second phase of the story, which, as I said, is first in order of statement:

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tables of the testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the Mount ... Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone.

He had no consciousness of the light which shone upon his face. His spirit had entered into a new fellowship with God. He had fathomed yet more deeply the unutterable abyss of the Being of Deity, and his whole spirit was mastered and held and captured and illuminated by the experience.

Now note the twice-repeated declaration: "When Moses came down from Mount Sinai"; "When he came down from the Mount." That which created his unconsciousness was the Mount, and the fact that he held in his hand those two tables of stone. The Mount was the place of Divine revealing, and that is always the place of self-concealing. The measure in which a soul passes into the presence of God is the measure in which the soul becomes unconscious of itself, and rises to the full dignity of the meaning of its own experience. The deep secret of the human soul is capacity for God which is always forgetfulness of self. He had been on the Mount with God, and all his consciousness was effaced by the fullness of experience. There were no atrophied powers, there was no loss of personality; but personality rose into full spiritual health; and personality in full spiritual health becomes unconscious of itself in its grasp upon God, for the knowledge of Whom and communion with Whom personality is created.

The introduction of the words, "With the two tables of t lie testimony in his hand," is a remarkable one. The first two tables of the testimony upon which were inscribed the ten words of the Law had been broken; and when Moses realized that he had two new tables in his hands, a supreme consciousness of God filled his soul. Those tables were the symbols of the whole truth that had been revealed. God had declared Himself a God of compassion and of holiness, and the possession of the newly written tables ratified the declaration. That is the Biblical revelation of God from beginning to end, and here it emerges in an almost unexpected place. He is the God of the second opportunity. The Law is broken! Grace will write the words again, and send them back to men that they may try again. Moses coming down from the Mount was not thinking of himself; he was thinking of God; and the light and the glory that He had given to him changed the fashion of his countenance.

There is nothing that we need today in this land of ours more than faces that shine. We cannot walk our streets today, we cannot travel by railway train without seeing shadowed faces everywhere. The faces that we need are faces that shine, strong in confidence, in hope, in sympathy.

I hold in my hand a clipping from a recent issue of The Bystander.

I fear that we English are not religious at all. (A sombre black tie as evidence of belief does not convince me. A dull-dog-look in the face is no proof of Christian conduct.) If we were really religious, we should light-heartedly wear flannels on Sundays (when weather permitted), and be merry and bright instead of hanging about like ticket-of-leave men afraid of being pulled up to report at any minute. There is enough cant and personal cowardice in our Sunday solemnity to convict us all of hypocrisy in every hour of the day. We are afraid of our neighbours, and they are afraid of us. We believe that if we are only sufficiently miserable we shall pass muster as being respectable. I am hoping that when our boys come back this insipid "respectability" will go to blazes.

My only apology for reading so frivolous a paragraph is that there is one sentence in it of which I want to make use. Let me say that this is a clipping from two columns, the whole of which consists of the senseless patter of some writer who knows nothing of the agonies of the human soul or of the holy ecstasies of which the soul is capable. "Flannels on Sunday!" There we have the whole shallow and impertinent philosophy revealed! The one sentence I refer to is this: "A dull-dog-look in the face is no proof of Christian conduct." That is perfectly true. A dull and sombre face is a denial of Christianity. What we need today, I repeat, is that there should be multiplied everywhere faces that are strong, not brutal - there is a difference; faces that shine with confidence, and never are careless - there is a very clear distinction; faces that are radiant with hope, not frivolous or indifferent; faces that are sympathetic, not pitiful. The Christian face will always be a face that has in it evidences of sorrow, but shining through will be a joy that transfigures the sack-cloth. It will be the face of Jesus reproduced in measure; the face concerning which a prophet long ere He came into time had foretold, which foretelling was fulfilled; His visage was more marred than that of any man; a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and yet the face of One Who could say to His disciples when the darkest clouds were gathering about Him, and the supremest sorrows were surging upon His soul, "These things have I spoken to you, that My joy may be in you."

It is now five-and-twenty years ago and more since a very simple thing came to my own personal knowledge which profoundly affected me at the time, and from the influence of which I have never escaped. A Yorkshire factory lass had given herself to Jesus Christ; the light and the joy of it was in her soul, and her face became transfigured. She was walking up and down the platform of York Station, waiting for a train. Sitting in a first-class railway carriage was a lady of title and culture. She saw the lassie pass her carriage two or three times, and at last called to her and said: "Excuse me, but what makes you look so happy?" The girl replied: "Was I looking happy? I did not know, but I can tell you why." And she told the woman the secret of her joy. She did not know that her face was shining, but the shining face of the factory lassie arrested the woman who was in agony. The end of the story is that this woman was led to the same Christ, and her face also became transfigured.

Such shining is always unconscious. The effort to look in any particular way is always a failure. All parents know this. There are times when for some reason or another in playfulness they try to look severely at their children, when they are not feeling so. It is never successful. We cannot cheat our children so. It is equally true that when, bowing to the empty conventionalities of a degenerate society, we try and look pleasant at our guests; when we are not feeling so, we always fail, and know perfectly well that we are failing. Perhaps one of the best illustrations may be found in the realm of photography. Is there any agony greater, or any effort more unsuccessful, than that of trying to look as one wishes to look when a picture is being taken? Yet listen to me. A few months ago I was looking at a picture of a beautiful woman, and on that face all the story of her love for her man was patent. She told me that it was taken for him, and that the negative had been destroyed. How had she succeeded? Do you imagine that when she sat for that picture she was thinking about her face? Never for a moment. She was thinking of him, and forgetting herself; and so the light of her love shone upon her face.

A shining face is always the expression of a shining soul; if there be no illumination of the soul, there can be no irradiation of the face. The ghastly smirk that imitates happiness is deplorable; it is tragic. The light within which makes us forgetful of ourselves is the light that transfigures the face. As the spirit is strong in God, the face expresses that strength. As the soul is confident in Him, confidence shines from the eyes. As the spirit is full of hope on the darkest day, hope is seen upon the countenance. As the soul is sensitive to human sorrow and joy, feels the pain and the bliss of others, all the sweet sympathy is manifested upon the face.

What, then, are the secrets of such shining? Let us go back to the story, I admit that times have altered, things are not as they were; but the deep philosophy of the story abides, and its principles are of immediate application.

First, there must be time on the Mount. Time on the Mount is time in which we separate ourselves from all the things of men; time which we give to the cultivation of our fellowship with God and the things of God.

And let us not forget that time on the Mount must be spent in the interest of the very men and the very things from which for the time we have withdrawn ourselves. Moses on the Mount was carrying the burden of the people in the valley. His unconscious shining of face was the outcome of the unconsciousness of himself that made him willing to say, "Blot me out of Thy Book, if only these people can be spared."

Again, there must be silence for God; praise and prayer, but also silence! Is not keeping silence before God almost a lost art among Christian people? "His face shone by reason of His speaking with him." Not by reason of Moses' speaking with God, but by reason of Moses' silence while God spoke to him. To silence, deliberately sought, reverently guarded, God will forever more speak; revealing to the waiting soul new phases of Himself; unveiling the mystery of His own character; telling of mercy and judgment; repeating the terms of the old covenant that we have broken that we may renew it again, the law of life that we have violated that we may obey it.

These are the secrets of unconsciousness also. We shall return presently to the valley of our appointed task, mastered by the memory of the Mount, carrying with us the things we have heard in secret, strengthened by the revelation in loneliness. All unconscious of ourselves, we shall go, faces shining with the light.

To the Mountains O my soul,

For fellowship with God;

To the valleys O my soul,

In company with God,

To the Mount of Light ascend,

For purity of soul;

To the valley dark descend,

To make the leper whole.

To the Mount of Life ascend,

For energy for toil;

To the Vale of Death descend,

The demon's power to foil.

To the Mount of Love ascend,

To suffer there for sin;

To the Vale of Hate descend,

To succour, and to win.

To the Mountains O my soul,

In company with God;

To the valleys O my soul,

In fellowship with God.

In the sequel of the story we find our application. Moses had to veil his face. And why? Not because the light was too bright for those people to look upon, but because he knew it was fading, it was passing away. Paul takes up the story, and says that there is no need for the veil now, because the light that shone in the face of Jesus Christ never fades and never passes away. He also says, "We all, with unveiled face, reflecting as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, are transfigured into the same image from glory to glory." In proportion as we know what it is to find our way to the Mount, and to see God in Christ, to hold fellowship with God in Christ, in that proportion the light that comes upon our faces shines with undimmed and growing splendour, and we have no need to wear the veil.

Does the light on our faces fade? Is the glory passing? Has all the brightness that shone from our eyes almost vanished away? Then we ought to veil our faces, or else cease to call ourselves Christians. There will be no need for the veil, if the mountain light of life and love is ever upon us, and, beholding, we reflect. So may we be men and women of shining faces.