**VOLUME 4; CHAPTER 15 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE SET TIME by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Thou wilt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: For it is time to have pity upon her: yea, the set time is come. For Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, And have pity upon her dust.*

*Psalm 102:13,14*

THIS PSALM PECULIAR, IN THAT IN THE INSCRIPTION TO be found at its head we have a declaration of its character, and a revelation of the circumstances under which it may be used. That inscription reads thus:

A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord.

It is a prayer of the afflicted when he is overwhelmed. It is a prayer that is to be used when the afflicted and overwhelmed soul is in the presence of Jehovah. It is a psalm, therefore, which sets affliction in the light of the government of God.

It is impossible and unnecessary to find the date of the writing of this psalm. Hengstenberg earnestly maintained that it was Davidic, whereas Perowne shares the general opinion that it was written in exile, and that the set time referred to the end of Jeremiah's seventy years, when the exiled people were hoping for the dawn of a better day.

These are opinions only. The far more interesting fact is that the author of the letter to the Hebrews ignores altogether the question of human dating and human authorship, and ascribes some of the words of the psalm to Jehovah Himself. In the opening chapter of that letter he declares that God says of His Son,

Of old hast Thou laid the foundation of the earth,

And the heavens are the work of Thy hands:

They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure,

all of which is direct quotation from the latter part of this psalm.

Consequently, the New Testament would lead us to understand that the fulfilment of the psalm - that is, the filling to the full of its spiritual significance - is only discovered as it is interpreted by the experiences of our blessed Lord Himself. According to the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, the psalm is pre-eminently and finally Messianic.

If that be accepted, let us at least pause long enough to notice the fact that it falls into three parts. In the first eleven verses we have nothing but the expression of overwhelming and desolating sorrow. At verse twenty-three the strain, broken in upon at verse eleven, is taken up again: "He weakened my strength in the way; He shortened my days. I said: O, my God, take me not away in the midst of my days." Again it is the plaintive note of an overwhelming grief. In the middle of that verse the tone changes, and we read, "Thy years are throughout all generations"; and we should certainly have read that as though it were still the appeal of the suffering one to God, were it not that the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says that these are words in which God answers the cry of His suffering servant. When out of the midst of sorrow he cries, the answer of the Father is this: "Thy years are throughout all generations. Of old hast Thou laid the foundation of the earth." Therein, we have revealed the secret of the Messiah's strength and victory.

But in the paragraph which I have omitted, verses twelve to twenty-two, we have the great song of Zion - Zion personified, Zion afflicted, Zion expecting deliverance. And the text that I have chosen this morning lies at the center of that central section of this wonderful psalm. Its immediate application is to Zion:

Thou wilt arise, and have mercy upon Zion:

For it is time to have pity upon her: yea, the set time is come.

Because thy servants take pleasure in her stones,

And have pity upon her dust.

That is, upon her very rubbish.

But if the immediate application, when the singer wrote his song, was an application to Zion, its principles are of much wider application. There is no solution suggested here of the problem of pain, or, to use the larger word, which indicates both cause and effect, there is no solution here of the universal problem of evil; but there is a revelation of the place of affliction in the economy of God for the men of faith. I am quite conscious that all about this text there is the atmosphere of Hebrew hope and expectation, I am quite conscious of how much there is in it that seems to belong wholly to the past; but I propose to turn aside from such things in order that we may discover two or three matters of supreme importance as they cast their light upon the afflictions of the men of faith. There is, I repeat therefore, a revelation here of the place of affliction in the economy of God. And I crave your patience while I tarry a moment longer, by way of introduction, to speak of the word affliction. I am not speaking here, neither is this the thought of the psalm, or the common thought of that word affliction, of certain phases of personal grief and sorrow, for the coming of which there is no responsibility resting upon the sufferers. That is an entirely different matter. Affliction here is chastisement, the dealing of God with a sinning people. Whether individually or nationally, or in a Church application, the principles are the same. And so I repeat, that in these wonderful verses of the ancient psalm, light is flung upon the economy of God in His method of afflicting His people on account of their sin.

I will first of all summarize these matters in three statements, which I shall then endeavor to lay before you by way of illustration and application.

These words, in the song of the psalmist, remind us first of all that there is a set time, a set time for deliverance out of affliction. "Thou wilt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: For it is time to have pity upon her: yea, the set time is come."

In the second place, this quotation from the song of the psalmist makes it perfectly evident that the set time for deliverance arrives when God arises. "Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion."

Finally, the song teaches us that the attitude of His people in affliction determines the set time of His arising to deliver. The set time is come because, "Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, And have pity upon her dust."

Let me repeat even more briefly the threefold thought. First, there is a set time in the economy of God for deliverance out of affliction. Secondly, the set time arrives when God arises. Finally, God arises when His people have gained the value of affliction.

Perhaps now I ought to pause long enough to say, in the presence of this congregation, that which is especially upon my heart. During the past week, I have been present at a very remarkable meeting in London. On Friday evening last, it was my privilege to speak at St. James's Hall in company with Canon Hay Aitken and Mr. John McNeill at a meeting called for the purpose of praise and thanksgiving for the Revival of Religion fifty years ago. And I am bound to say to you this morning, speaking as I now do to my own people, and in the home of my own service, that I was variously impressed by that gathering. That it was a very remarkable one, no one who was present can possibly deny. To sit surrounded by so many of these men was to feel glad that so many of them tarried until this hour. To hear the story of what God then wrought was to fill the soul, even at this distance, with a great joy and a great gladness. But to be in that meeting was to be conscious of a grave peril, a peril that I think characterizes this hour peculiarly - the peril of persistent looking back instead of confident looking up. And growing out of that is another peril - that of desiring to imitate the methods of the past, to adopt the phrasing of the past, to compel this age to forgetfulness of the freedom and the freshness of the Spirit's activity, and to crowd it back into the methods of fifty years ago.

I was impressed, moreover, with the more insidious and graver peril of an undue haste to be away from the time of affliction. That this is a time of affliction in spiritual things, I suppose we are all ready to admit. There is a sense in which we do sigh for manifestations of bygone days, a sense in which we cannot help being appalled, first of all, at the apparent carelessness and overwhelming indifference of the masses of the people to spiritual things; and, secondly, at the growing selfishness of the most spiritually minded people in the Christian Church. First, I say at the carelessness and indifference of vast multitudes of men and women by whom we are surrounded. We need look no further afield than our own city. We need take in no wider period than that of this morning's service. We have but to remind ourselves of facts with which we are so familiar that they fail to appeal to us, that at this very hour the vast mass of London's population has no thought of God and no care for religion.

We have also to confess that there is a grave danger in this hour, that we should be guilty of that which James described, as asking in order that we may spend upon our own lusts. Remember, brethren, that passage has an application to us, and its profoundest application is not that which we usually make. The lust of spiritual selfishness is more devilish than the animal lust of the street, When a Christian man fore-ever prays that God will bless him, and loses his passion for the lost and the ruined, he is denying Christ far more forcibly than the man who profanes openly upon the public highway; and the peril of all our Bible conferences and conventions is this, that vast crowds come together for their own spiritual enrichment.

I know that this is a day of dearth, a day of drought, a day of affliction; but I am growingly convinced that the thing we need to do is to discover, and yield to the principle revealed in this passage in the Psalms, the principle revealed through all the teaching of the Bible. We need to come to an understanding of the fact, that when we pray that God will end this state of things we may be very sincere; but we may be making a profound mistake, and God may be saying to us, in answer to our praying: "Wherefore criest thou unto Me? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." While we may be absolutely sincere as we cry, "Awake, awake; put on strength, O arm of the Lord," He may answer us as He answered His people in the ancient days: "Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem." It is as though, in answer to our cry to God for revival, He should say to us, I have never slept or slumbered. It is you who have slept and slumbered. In order that we may understand this matter, let us here consider these things in quiet and solemn meditation. I bring you this morning the message which God has spoken to my heart, a message not to you, beloved, first, but to me; and to be shared with you, because I believe it is the thing we need to hear in the presence of the widespread drought in spiritual things that characterizes our outlook.

Let us, then, remember that there is a set time, and mark the significance of the word - an appointed time, a set time for deliverance out of affliction. This is in itself a message full of comfort, full of encouragement. We must, however, consider it in its relationship to the other things to be said; but let us dwell upon the simple fact itself for two or three minutes. The people of God in the day of affliction are not abandoned by God. The verse preceding that which I have chosen as text has these words: "But Thou, O Lord, shalt abide forever." The marginal reading of the Revision surely helps us here. "But Thou, O Jehovah, sittest as King forever, And Thy memorial unto all generations." This was the consciousness out of which the song of the psalmist's confidence was born, God has not abandoned His people in the day that seems to be a day of drought, and a day of darkness, and a day of affliction. He is nigh when He seems absent. He is watching when He seems blind. He is active when He seems idle. Said Habakkuk, mystified by the drought and darkness, and the dread of the day in which he lived: "What is God doing? 'I cry out unto Thee of violence, and Thou wilt not save.' " He complained because of the sin of his age, and God seemed to make no response. In answer to that complaint, Jehovah declared: "I work a work in your days, which ye will not believe though it be told you." And then He told him - told him that He was girding Cyrus, a man outside the covenant, to do the work which was not being done by the people within the covenant. And Habakkuk, more amazed than ever, said: "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will look forth to see what He will speak with me;" and the result of that patient waiting for God was that the prophecy ended with a great song:

For though the fig tree shall not blossom,

Neither shall fruit be in the vines;

The labour of the olive shall fail,

And the fields shall yield no meat;

The flocks shall be cut off from the fold,

And there shall be no herd in the stalls;

Yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

That is the true attitude of faith today. In the midst of the drought, in the midst of the failure, we dishonour God when we allow ourselves to give way to panic: "Thou, O Lord, sittest as King forever."

We are to remember also that deliverance is always closely related to affliction in the economy of God. Deliverance is the reason of affliction. He doth not willingly afflict. And wherever affliction comes, His purpose is deliverance; not from the affliction, but from that which was the reason of the coming of the affliction. Why does God afflict, with-hold the evidences of His power, suffer the deadly drought to settle upon His people, until there is no flower and no fruit, and no realization of spiritual things? In order to correct some underlying evil, and therefore deliverance is the reason of the affliction. He afflicts in order to bring a deeper and profounder deliverance. We cry too often to be delivered from the punishment, instead of the sin that lies behind it. We are anxious to escape from the things that cause us pain rather than from the things that cause God pain. Deliverance is the reason of affliction, and deliverance, therefore, is the issue of affliction. And when it comes, it is the explanation of affliction. The Church of God has never yet passed through a period of affliction, but that, looking back, it has seen the reason of it; and the wonderful deliverance wrought has explained all the process of chastisement and of darkness.

And once again, therefore, affliction in the economy of God is beneficent. Read the song of Zion in this central paragraph to the end, and what do you find? "That men may declare the name of the Lord in Zion, And His praise in Jerusalem." The result, then, of affliction in the experience of the men of faith is the blessing of others.

All the days of darkness are in His economy. These principles have application to the individual; they have application to the nation; they have application to the Church of God.

I turn over in this wonderful Book of Psalms to the one hundred and nineteenth, and I find the value of affliction in the life of the individual recognized in these words. In verse sixty-seven: "Before I was afflicted I went astray; But now I observe Thy word," In verse seventy-one: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Thy statutes." In verse seventy-five: "I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are righteous, And that in faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me." How many saints there are in this congregation this morning who could add their testimony to the truth of these words! Delivered from affliction we see its infinite value, and we are able to say, It was good for us that we have been afflicted.

That also is true in national life. Without turning to it now, I pray you read most carefully at your leisure that awe-inspiring passage, the first chapter of Isaiah, in which all the bruising and wounding and affliction of Israel is revealed to be God's necessary method of restoring the nation to Himself.

Or, in illustration of the application of the principle to the Church, remember the words of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, which we read in our lesson: "All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous, but grievous: yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness."

By so much as the present darkness and the present drought is the act of God - and it must be His act, for He withholds - it is part of a process by which He is preparing for a great deliverance, Decreases! I am weary of the lament over them. They may most assuredly be evidences that God is at work, sifting among His people. I pick up all kinds of religious newspapers, and I read of decrease and of consequent lamentation. Nay, rather thank God if He will but sift our ranks, and make our numbers less, in order to make our forces greater, for then deliverance is at the doors. All the afflictions of God, if we set affliction in the light of His Throne of government, are beneficent.

But now mark the second thought. The set time of deliverance arrives when God arises. "Thou wilt arise, and have mercy upon Zion," and that takes us back to the initial word, "But Thou, O Lord, sittest as King forever." There is no limitation of His knowledge. He understands the causes, watches the processes, and proceeds toward the issues. There is no limitation of His power, and mark how the psalmist explains this: "Thy memorial, Thy remembrance unto all generations." That is to declare that God's attitude always takes posterity into account; that whatever He does today, He is doing not only in the interest of today, but in the interest of tomorrow. His remembrance of the generations is a principle that we often forget when we revolt against Divine judgments; that when God visits in judgment it is not merely the moment of His visitation which is within His own infinite mind, but the next moment, and the following day, and the years that lie ahead, and the centuries and millenniums and ages of the future. The King Who sitteth enthroned forever is not acting in your life in the interest of the half-hour in which He acts, but in the interest of all the generations that lie ahead. Why should we attempt to hasten His movements? Why should we pray as though He had forgotten? Why should we express the agony of our hearts in the presence of present failure as though the blame of it lay upon God? He will arise, said the psalmist. When? At the right moment, at the set time, when trouble has done its work He ends it. When wrath has praised Him, He restrains it. When the forsaking for a season has resulted in a sense of need, He returns. Nothing can prevent Him; His remembrance never fails. It is not necessary that we should remind Him. His purpose never changes. It is useless that we should attempt to change it. His throne never trembles. It is not necessary that we should endeavor to hold it up. I speak out of my own heart when I say to you that I am convinced that what we need is a new vision of God and a new vision of His throne, in order to be delivered from the panic that fills our hearts within the Church about spiritual things, and within the nation about national things. These restless, feverish, godless, narrow thoughts sweeping over us are born of a dim vision of the throne of God, and of the God Who sits upon it.

Thou, O Jehovah, sittest as King forever,

And Thy memorial unto all generations.

Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion;

and the heart that comes to consciousness of this twofold fact is delivered from panic, and is kept firm and steady.

But once again and finally, and this is the point of importance to us. The attitude of God's own people determines the set time of His arising to deliver.

Thou wilt arise, and have mercy upon Zion:

For it is time to have pity upon her: yea, the set time is come.

Because Thy servants take pleasure in her stones,

And have pity upon her dust.

Place the psalm where you will in the history of the ancient people, it matters not: the principle is the same. Jerusalem in ruins, her stones in heaps, her beauteous places piles of rubbish; and the people have been careless and indifferent. But at last there comes a sense of shame and a sense of repentance and contrition, and they begin to mourn over the ruin. In that hour the set time is come, Not when amid the ruin the nation flings the blame of it upon God, but when amid the ruin the nation takes the shame of it into its own heart, and gets down in humiliation before God; that is the hour of hope. These are the tears which He gilds with the glory of a new day. This is the hour for God's arising. When the lesson is learned, and the wayward heart weeps over the ruin, the set time for deliverance has come. When - it may be through blood and desolation - the nation learns the value of righteousness, then the set time for deliverance is come.

Or, finally - and that is the main point of application now - when within the Christian Church the ineffectiveness of everything in the absence of God makes us pity the dust of Zion, the day of revival is dawning. The interpretation of that thought is to be found in the words of Christ to Laodicea. What Laodicea said, the Church is in danger of saying today: "I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing." The Divine estimate is otherwise: "Thou art the wretched one, and miserable and poor and blind and naked." When the Church realizes the truth of that, and comes to the realization of the ineffectiveness of all she has, while Christ is excluded, having to seek admission to His own home, then the day is dawning, and the first breath of the wind of renewal may be felt sweeping over the garden of God.

I say to you solemnly this morning, it is utterly useless to meet and pray for revival. Let us rather humble ourselves before God, repent in dust and ashes, confess that numbers and wealth and statistics are nothing, that what we supremely need to recognize is our ruin and our rubbish. When we pity these, God will pity us. The set time of deliverance is determined by the attitude of His people.

This meditation, beloved, should produce two results. It should cure all panic, if our hearts are right with God. "He sitteth as King forever," and He will arise. And, strange and contradictory as this affirmation may seem, a paradox indeed, if this meditation should issue in the cure of panic, it will also become the inspiration of anxiety - anxiety to learn the lessons of our affliction, and anxiety to right the wrongs that exist within our own borders. We must be patient with God because He is patient with us. We must be impatient, not with Him, but with ourselves. The day of revival, the day of visitation, the day of new blessing, manifested perchance in a new way, entirely different from anything the past has ever seen, comes to the individual, to the nation, to the Church in that hour when he or it or she has learned the lessons of affliction.

We wait beneath the furnace blast

The pangs of transformation;

Not painlessly doth God recast,

And mould anew the nation

Where wrongs expire;

Nor spares the hand

That from the land

Uproots the ancient evil.

Then let the selfish lips be dumb,

And hushed the breath of sighing;

Before the joy of peace must come

The pains of purifying.

God give us grace, each in his place

To bear his lot;

And, murmuring not,

Endure and wait the labour.

In the midst of affliction, therefore, let us remember that God needs no persuasion to act, and that our anxiety should be that we come to such an attitude as will enable Him to do so.