**VOLUME 4; CHAPTER 16 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**GOD's FIGHTING FORCES by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you.*

*Judges 7:7*

IN HIS ADDRESS FROM THE CHAIR OF THE CONGREGATIONAL Union last month, Mr. J. D. Jones, of Bournemouth, uttered these words:

Numbers are not the first consideration with the Christian Church. We need to be delivered from the tyranny of schedules and from the craven fear of comparative tables and statistics. It is possible for churches to lose in numbers, as Gideon did, and to gain in strength.

These were courageous words in an hour when the passion for figures is paramount, and when the mention of decrease breeds panic in the heart of the people of God. They were timely words because on every hand we hear of decreases. The returns of church membership come in at this season of the year in many cases, and if one note has impressed me in the meetings of this year which we now designate May meetings, it has been the note of depression consequent upon statistics which declare decrease in church membership. I have not the ear of all the Christian Church, but I have the ear of those who gather here, and I desire to utter a solemn and at the same time, I trust, a sympathetic and courteous protest against this whole business of lamentation.

Yet, we are compelled to recognize the absence of many things which even our eyes have seen in other days and under other conditions, the absence of many things of which our fathers have spoken, and of which we have read in the history of the Church. There does seem to be just now a widespread indifference among multitudes of our people to spiritual things, and an almost appalling lack of enthusiasm within the Church of God. If we are not to be depressed by the story of decrease, we are to be anxious as to our own personal, individual responsibility, not for the decreases, but for the halt which seems to have come in the march of those enterprises of our Lord and Master which are, or ought to be, the supreme things in our thinking, in our life, and in our serving.

I am not interested in the causes of decrease. I believe that the cause - and I draw the distinction carefully between the singular and the plural - is that God is sifting our ranks, revealing weakness as prerequisite to the creation of strength. It is not against the sense that we have been halted, and that there is a lack of spiritual consciousness, that I make my protest. It is rather against the way in which men deal with this sense. It is against the prevalent idea that decrease itself is a sign of the absence of the working of God. Not that we are to be less careful concerning the matters of His Kingdom, but that we should interpret the signs of the times in the light of God's perpetual method with His people. So far as I read my Bible, so far as I am able to read the doings of God in the history of the Church for nineteen centuries, I affirm that sifting and decrease are but evidences of His activity. Let us understand that activity. I have read these words from the address of my dear and honoured friend Mr. Jones, and my business this evening is to take the illustration which he gave in less than half a sentence, and make it the basis upon which we may illustrate and enforce the principle that he laid down in the course of the brief paragraph I read to you.

Let us remind ourselves again of this old story of Gideon. Seven and forty years had passed since Deborah had sung her song. After the singing of that song, and the deliverance wrought through the inspiration of the prophetess and the leadership of Barak, the land had rest for forty years. There succeeded to the forty years of rest seven years of Midianitish oppression. It is not for me this evening to tell the story of that oppression. It is written in the Book of Judges, and you may turn to it for yourselves if you are not already familiar with it. Suffice it to say that perhaps at no period in the earlier history of the people of God was oppression so severe, and suffering so great, and the sense of defeat so overwhelming as during those seven years of Midian's oppression. One instance will suffice. The people were so cruelly treated, so oppressed by Midian that in multitudes they had left their homes and made dwellings for themselves in dens and caves of the earth, hardly daring to show their faces. Then there came the hour, the "set time." The "set time" arrived when the people became conscious that the visitation was a visitation of chastisement and judgment, and affliction of God intended to teach them lessons of profound importance. With the coming of the "set time" there came, as there always does, the providential man. Gideon was discovered, not by Israel, but by God. God almost invariably discovers the man of the hour where no one else is looking for him. He found Gideon, and there were two qualifications in the character of Gideon which fitted him for service. First, that of his personal faith in God; and secondly, that of his fidelity to his own business. With reluctance almost amounting to fear, he shrank from the work to which he was called, and asked tests of God. We may criticize him for so doing. We might be inclined to say that it was evidence of faltering and feebleness of faith, and I think such criticism would be perfectly true; but while we criticize, let us remember that God gave him the tests he asked.

Gideon sent his call through the tribes, and in response there gathered to him thirty-two thousand men. As I watch them gathering out of the different tribes around the standard of Gideon, two thoughts occur to me. First, it is a very wonderful response, seeing the terrible condition of the people. Second, it is an utterly inadequate response, if the vast hosts of Midian are to be engaged in battle and overcome. These, I say, would be the impressions made upon my own mind if I watched the movement with perfect naturalness, as one unacquainted with the deeper secrets of the Divine procedure. A leader has arisen, he cries for helpers, and thirty-two thousand marshal to him from among the oppressed people. Only thirty-two thousand! If you can put yourselves back for a moment in imagination in the place of Gideon, and look at these hosts of Midian encamped along the valleys, holding all the strategic positions, hemming in the people of God, and then look at the army of thirty-two thousand as against the unnumbered hosts of Midian, you will discover how hopeless the task must have seemed, to engage Midian's trained, disciplined hosts with only thirty-two thousand oppressed, and broken, and degraded people.

Then the voice of God, speaking in the soul of the man, declared to him that the people were too many. Too many! A very simple test is given. He is to proclaim to the company that all who are - mark the words - fearful and trembling shall return to their tents. Almost immediately we see twenty- two thousand passing back because they are fearful and trembling, Now Gideon has only ten thousand left. Again the voice of God, speaking within the soul of the man, declares to him that the number is too great, and a new test is imposed. The essential need of the physical life of these men is water. Let them now be tested in the presence of necessities. I watch the procedure. It is purely Eastern, and as such we must look upon it. Of the ten thousand, nine thousand seven hundred kneel, bending over the water in order to obtain that which is a necessity of life; but there are three hundred men who stand, and, bending over, catch the water in their hands and lap it. Three hundred men taking necessary things, but in the evident expectation of the work they had to do. Nine thousand, seven hundred men taking unnecessary time with necessary things. It was a severe ordeal. Nine thousand, seven hundred men go back. Then the words of my text are heard: "By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you." That is a story of decrease. It is the story of God's method of sifting a people.

Look over the actual story again. The whole nation is conscious of the oppression under which it suffers. The whole nation desires deliverance, but when the call is given, of the nation thirty-two thousand rise a little higher than the nation, thirty-two thousand are prepared to make some venture, and to gather around the standard that is being raised. Among the thirty-two thousand there are twenty-two thousand who are not quite sure, twenty-two thousand who feel the tremor of fear shaking them, and they are sent home; ten thousand are left who have moved to a higher level. Of that ten thousand, there are nine thousand seven hundred who will take unnecessary time for the supply of the necessities of life. Let them be sent home. There are three hundred only out of the whole nation for God's fight.

There is no more radiant revelation of God's method of sifting His people in the whole Bible. It is a revelation of the fact that with God quality is infinitely more than quantity. It is an explanation out of the Old Testament of the reason of the severity of the terms of Jesus as we read them in the New. It explains that constant habit of our Lord and Master, strange habit that has so often surprised and startled us, of scattering crowds by the severity of His terms. I venture to affirm that there are words of Jesus in the New Testament which if I read in this congregation at this late hour of the Christian era, men would shrink from them as from the touch of fire. This severity of terms was due to the fact that always quality counts with God for more than quantity. That is a beneficent movement, therefore, which sifts the ranks and gets rid of certain classes of men, always because, in order to accomplish any great, mighty work, God must have men upon whom He can depend.

There are two lines of thought that I shall ask you to follow briefly. First, the story as it reveals the men with whom God cannot move to victory. Second, the story on the positive side, as it reveals to us the character of the forces with which God is able to win His triumphs.

I am not discussing the subject of personal salvation, but that of service. There is no weak, faltering, failing, cowardly heart that God refuses to receive for salvation. Let no man imagine that God demands that any man who is seeking His grace and favor shall be courageous. He may come with all his trembling and all his weakness, meanness, cowardice, and God will make him a new man.

There are two classes with which God cannot proceed to victory - the fearful and the trembling. Who are the men who are fearful - the men in whose vision the foe bulks bigger than God? That is always a cause of fear. It is a perfectly natural thing. I see those massed, mighty hosts of Midian encamped in all the valleys, and I feel that it was a perfectly natural thing that men looking at those hosts, continuing to look at them, beginning to count them, should be filled with fear. The natural outlook in the great conflict of right with wrong is always a depressing outlook. It always has been; it is yet. It is possible for us today to count the forces against us, and gaze upon them until the heart is filled with fear. These twenty-two thousand men who were fearful were men who were looking at the foe. Is there not a deeper reason why they were fearful when they looked at the foe? I think the second word in the ancient record helps us, trembling. Why trembling? They were men who thought more of their own safety than of the great cause. They looked at the hosts, and said: "If this means battle we shall be slain; we cannot win." That was the inspiration of panic. They were not prepared for suffering and death. They were fearful because they looked at the foe, trembling because they were more anxious about their own safety and ease than they were concerning the great victory of the Kingdom of God.

Why is it that God declines to move with such men for the accomplishment of His enterprises? First, because such men create panic in a crisis; fear is contagious. Lead thirty-two thousand men to fight, twenty-two thousand of whom are fearful, and the ten thousand will be afraid in the clash of the conflict and in the hour of battle. Second, because men who are fearful and trembling cannot strike any heavy blow in the hour of battle. Trembling is always weakness.

I am inclined to think the application need not be made in any word of mine. Are we afraid of the issue? Then God cannot work with us. Are we so busy in these days, looking at the foe and counting the forces against the Lord, that in our heart there is the tremor of fear? Then we are not the men God can depend upon. In the day of battle our fear will spread to others; it is contagious. In the day of dire conflict we cannot place any heavy blow upon the foe. Fear paralyzes the arm because it unnerves the heart. All such fear is born of gazing upon the foe. The fearful and trembling man God cannot use. I know the word is a severe one, but it is the word of this story and of the whole Bible. The trouble today is that the fearful and trembling man insists upon remaining in the army. A decrease that sifts the ranks of the Church of men who fear and tremble is a great, a gracious and a glorious gain.

Mark the second type of man revealed. I have twice described this man as one who takes unnecessary time over necessary things. To do that is always to lack a keen sense of the urgency of the mission in hand. This is one of the causes of weakness and failure today, and perhaps a more prolific and widespread cause than any other. Is not this true of many men who have no fear of the ultimate issue, the ultimate victory, who have no panic as regards God's ability; but while they name the name of Christ, and profess to be His crusaders, they take unnecessary time over necessary things? There are things necessary to the physical life, if I may begin on the lowest level, such as eating, sleeping, dressing. There is a vast amount of time wasted by men who name the name of Christ on all these. Or take the mental level. Unnecessary time is spent over reading, unnecessary time over study and investigation. I have in my own mind now a man, finely, wonderfully equipped in mind, who has spent all his life in preparation, and has done nothing - no blow struck, no brick laid in the great building, no serious work put into the business of cooperation with God. Unnecessary time is taken over the most necessary business of personal spiritual culture, reading and study of the Bible, with no application of its teaching in the warfare against sin, seeking for personal enrichment in the spiritual realm, and no output in sacrifice and strenuous endeavor. Unnecessary time is taken over recreation. I think I need not say one single word here to defend myself from misunderstanding. I believe in the necessity for recreation, but how much time we are wasting! Unnecessary time in the matters of the daily calling, the amassing of wealth.

There is no sense of urgency. The idea of Christianity with too many has become that of an opportunity for their own worship and their own ultimate salvation, and they forget that there is a great battle on, and that God is seeking for warriors, and that He does - account for it how you will or leave it unaccounted for, a mystery of His own gracious and perfect will - He does limit Himself by the method of seeking the cooperation of men. He must, as His own economy has arranged, strike the blow for His victory through men. There is no instance in all the history of the centuries of God acting entirely as apart from His own. All this is lost sight of, and we name the Name, and sing the songs, and wear the uniform of the army, but we take unnecessary time over these necessary things.

The urgency of this business of Christ's campaign in the world, His battle against evil, His compassionate regard for men, and His desire to deliver them, His passion for the Kingdom of God; these things are not recognized as urgent. Such attitude is not the attitude of conflict. Such repletion of necessary things unfits for campaigning. If it be that in these days He is sifting, sifting, sifting; and those departing are those who are fearful and afraid, or such as are not prepared to make His business the one overwhelming master passion of all their life, then we gain by the decreases. Even though the numbers be reduced until they be but three hundred out of every thirty-two thousand, God's word to us, as it was to Gideon of old, is this: "By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you."

Who, then, are the men who constitute God's fighting force in the world? They are courageous men. That is to say, they were men who saw the vision of God, who saw God at the back of national life, and who saw God in the movement to which they were called. They were men who were prepared to venture something in the great enterprise of the moment, men with such a lack of consciousness of their own importance that they were prepared to die. A man never can say this kind of thing in this day without being rebuked for it. I made a reference of this kind in a recent sermon here, and have had several letters protesting against my saying that it is necessary today for a man to die for Christ. I am perfectly aware that every man must be true to the laws of God about his own health in the interest of the war; but all of this lack of conviction about the supreme importance of the things of the Kingdom of God breeds ease and softness, and unfits men for the fight. God does want men today who have such a clear vision of Himself as to have no panic in their hearts and such abandonment of themselves that they have no trembling as they go forth to the war. Such men inspire confidence. Thank God He has many such today, more than three hundred. Such men do exploits; they are winning their victories even in a day when we hear of decrease. He has those upon whom He can depend. They are men of courage, courage born of their vision of God and of their conviction of the supremacy in all life of the matters of His Kingdom.

They are also consecrated men. Consecration means discipline, the ability to do without. Consecration means ability to take necessary things in necessary quantity and in necessary time. This is the practical expression of consecration. Men who realize the urgency, and "use the world as not abusing it." God seeks such men because with such men He can fight, for such men are ready for the fight, and are not seeking merely for parade; and because such men are ready for the fight, they can "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ."

Turning, finally, from the story itself, and with its teaching in our hearts, let us apply God's tests and act. Are we fearful, are we trembling? How shall we cure this tremor of the spirit, this fear in the heart? Only as we see God. Unless the vision of God be clear to us, it is better for ourselves and for the world, and better for the Kingdom of God, that we retire out of the fighting line. What does the vision of God do for a man? It reveals two things to him invariably. First, his own utter, absolute unworthiness and uselessness. Secondly, God's infinite ability, and his own usefulness to God when once he yields himself to Him.

Mark the stories of your Old Testament. The vision of God was granted to the prophet, and he said: "Woe is me, for I am undone." When a vision of God came, the patriarch who had argued at length against all the philosophy of his friends said: "Behold, I am of small account." Daniel, in the light of that vision, exclaimed: "My righteousness is become as filthy rags." No man ever comes to a vision of God without feeling the sense of his own unworthiness and the overwhelming conviction of his own inability. That is the first condition for fitness for fighting. I know how easily it is said, and I know also how hardly the lesson is learned. I speak tonight in the presence of those whose experience in life and warfare has been longer than mine, but I am perfectly sure, if my appeal might be made to them, and their answer given to this congregation, they would all agree that the hour of victorious fighting in the enterprises of God dawned when they found their own weakness and inability. It is out of the "I am unable" that there comes the great "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Gideon saw God, and saw that he could do nothing apart from God, and therein was the first stage in preparation for doing everything. He shrank from his work. Therein was evidence of the commencement of God's making him fit for the doing of his work. Over against the panic to which I have made reference, over against this complaining lament which has run like a minor monotone through the meetings of the past month, there is another tone even more perilous, the tone that affirms our ability to do anything. The courage that can endure fighting and conquer is always generated in a sense of unworthiness and unfitness born of the flaming vision of God. There Gideon began. There Isaiah, Job and Daniel began. There all the men of the past began, and there we must begin. We shrink from it and hold back from it. We will not look toward the glory that breaks upon our lives, will not submit ourselves to the fiery, searching test of the eyes of flame. Hence our weakness and hence our fear. False fear can only be cast out by the birth of the new fear, the fear of God and the fear of our own inability.

Our first business is to inquire in His presence as to whether we are fearful and trembling, and, if so, then what is left to us? I put the whole thing into this brief word. See God, or else retire from the fighting line.

To make application of the second truth both in its negative and positive aspects. Are we kneeling at some stream of personal satisfaction? I am afraid, as I almost invariably am today, to begin to illustrate that question, and apply it. I would infinitely rather leave the question to be answered alone in the presence of God.

Suffer me an impossible supposition. If Christ is to be defeated, how much will you lose when He is bankrupt? That is the test of whether we are ready for God's fight or not. What have we put into this business of time, of toil and serving? When that question is asked, we begin to see where we are, kneeling at some stream simply desiring to satisfy ourselves. Up, men, lap and march, or fall behind! The Christian Church devoted to the Christ of God, having seen the vision that rebukes and heals, having observed the glory that burns and renews; the Christian Church, placing all her resources, the resources of her individual membership at the disposal of Christ; and the Christian Church, conscious that the first business of every believer, not on one day in seven, but on seven days in seven, not in fulfilling the service of the sanctuary, but in all the duties of the hurrying days, is the business of waging Christ's warfare and winning Christ's victory; that Church will immediately produce the very results that we long to see, arousing the attention of the multitudes, affirming the reality of spiritual things, compelling men - or, if you will take the more tender word, constraining men - to the Lord Christ. All dearth and all death are to be blamed upon our own failure and not upon the withholdings of God. The Midianitish hosts are in all the valleys; the forces against God and His Christ are marshaled, perchance, as they never were before. We are not to be oblivious of the forces of the foe, but in God's name, we are not to look at them so long that we fail to see God Himself.

The true outlook is that of the man who wrote the Roman epistle, who began by looking with such intrepid courage into the heart of the world's corruption as he wrote the third chapter of the Romans. If you want to know what are the massed forces of sensualism and evil, read that chapter again and again, and yet again. Paul began there. He looked straight into the heart of it, but he did not end there, He moved on in argument and appeal until I see him climbing the height, surveying all the field, and saying: "If God is for us, who is against us?" There is a note of laughter in the question, a ring of triumph in the challenge! He saw the forces massed against Christ and His Church - things present, things to come, angels, principalities, powers, all the massed forces of spiritual and material evil - and he said: "If God is for us, who is against us?"

A man with such a vision of God is such a one as Paul, who for at least three and thirty years of Christian service never halted, never wavered, never took unnecessary time even for necessary things, was forevermore a warrior and a pilgrim, a builder and a toiler, in perils oft by land and sea. We lack this vision, therefore we lack this consecration. Now God is sifting the ranks. Let us be reverent and let us wait, and let us have done with our lamentation over falling statistics; but in God's name let Him have His way with us. Let us at least remit our own lives to Him, and beseech Him to banish the fear and end the trembling by giving us a clearer vision of Himself. Let us beseech Him that He will so reveal to us the urgency of the enterprise that we never again shall bend over a stream and take unnecessary time over even necessary things. Then we shall be among the number of those of whom he will say today, as he said of old: "By the three hundred that lapped will I save you."