**VOLUME 4; CHAPTER 21 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**FINAL WORDS by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*The Lord be with thy spirit. Grace be with you.*

*2 Timothy 4:21*

*Grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen.*

*2 Peter 3:18*

*The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints. Amen.*

*Revelation 22:21*

LET ME SAY IMMEDIATELY THAT THE TEXTS ARE CHOSEN for a definite purpose, which has only a secondary association with what they say. It is not my intention to deal with them from the standpoint of their particular teaching. My interest is rather in the fact that in each case they are the last recorded words of the men who wrote them: of Paul, of Peter, and of John. The systematic history of the New Testament ends with the last chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. That history gathers round a company of witnesses, martyrs, confessors of Jesus Christ the Lord. It covers a period probably of about three and thirty years, and gives some account of the journeyings, doings, and teachings of these persons. Among them, the three outstanding personalities are those of Peter, John, and Paul. John does not appear often in the Acts, and only in association with Peter. The last definite reference to him therein has to do with his journey through Samaria with Peter. It is possible that he was at the Council called to consider the Gentile question about fifteen years later, but it is not definitely so stated. Peter is the most prominent figure in all the earlier part of that history, but he passes completely out of sight after the Council. Paul is the central figure in all the later part of that history, which is occupied with his missionary journeyings up to the time of his first imprisonment in Rome.

Beyond that, we have no authentic history. There are many traditions and legends of the Church, some of them undoubtedly well founded, but many of them quite unreliable. In the group of writings which complete the New Testament we have certain references which carry us a little further than the Book of Acts. These, however, are by no means connected, and are not enough to enable us to follow the story consecutively. It is interesting to observe that all these subsequent historic references are from the pens of these three men, John, Peter and Paul.

Paul, before his first imprisonment, had written of his desire to visit Spain. Writing from prison, he declared his expectation that he would be set at liberty, and would see Philippi again. In his latest letters, he spoke of visits made to Crete, to Macedonia, to Miletus, to Troas, and described himself in the very last letter as a prisoner, evidently again in Rome. Peter makes one historic allusion. He writes his first letter as from Babylon. John tells us the fact that he was a prisoner in Patmos.

The last historic glimpses of these men which the Testament affords then are these: Paul was a prisoner Rome; Peter was at Babylon, perhaps the new Babylon built on the Euphrates, perhaps Rome itself. John was exiled in Patmos. Here, then, we have the historic background for their last written words. Paul, from his Roman dungeon, wrote: "The Lord be with thy spirit. Grace be with you." Peter, from Babylon, wrote: "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the Glory both now and forever. Amen." John, possibly from Ephesus, but with Patmos as his supreme consciousness, wrote: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints."

Let us think about all this. As I do so, I am impressed with three things. First, with the circumstances in which we last see these men; second, with the one thought that was evidently uppermost in the mind of each of them, that of grace; and finally, with the effect which grace had upon them, as it is revealed by these final words.

We begin with the circumstances. The discussion of differences of opinion as to dates here is unnecessary. I shall proceed upon the assumption of the accuracy of Sir William Ramsay's view as to Paul and Peter; that Paul died in 65, and Peter in 80. I am among the number of those who resolutely put the death of John latest of all, somewhere about the year 96.

Paul was in Rome, expecting his death shortly and violently. Said he in this letter: "l am already being offered." He was tragically alone. "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present age." "Crescens is gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me." He was conscious of the grave perils that were threatening the infant Church, as witness the whole of that second letter to Timothy.

Peter was in Babylon. There are those that believe his reference was actually to Babylon on the Euphrates, the new Babylon that had been built upon the site of the old. There are those who believe that when he used the word Babylon he used it mystically and was referring to Rome. I have no care to discuss the question. Either in Babylon upon the Euphrates or in Babylon upon the Tiber, Peter was expecting a violent death, for in his letter he said, "The putting off of my tabernacle cometh swiftly, even as our Lord Jesus Christ signified unto me." He was far removed from his own land, and from his own people. He also was keenly conscious of the perils that were threatening the Church, for his last letter is full of warnings concerning them.

John, as I have said, when he wrote the Revelation was probably in Ephesus, but the whole temper and tone of it was created by Patmos, the island in the Mediterranean, where he was a prisoner, and severed by the surrounding waters from his own land and all his own people. He also saw the failure of the Churches, as witness the seven letters in the Apocalypse.

From such somber surroundings these men wrote their last words, and each wrote about grace.

Peter was the elemental man; always stumbling; always climbing a little higher as the result of his failure; coming out at last to strong rock character and confirming the faith of his brethren. The last thing he wrote was this: "Grow in grace."

John was the mystic, seeing the unseen, hearing the inarticulate, sensing the infinite. He ended everything by saying: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints."

Paul was the theologian, the philosopher, the mystic, the statesman. He concluded his message almost abruptly, in one blunt, brief sentence: "Grace be with you."

In each case the pen was laid down, for the last thing was said. All these men, the great human Peter; the mystic dreamer, John; the profound thinker, Paul; when they came to the end had one supreme consciousness. It was the consciousness of grace.

It is first interesting to notice how these men employed the term. It is pre-eminently Paul's word. Does that surprise you? Shall I confess that it surprised me? If I had been asked which of these men was the most likely to talk most about grace, I should have said John. It is not so. He mentioned it least. It was the great word of Paul. It abounds in every letter. We cannot read many sentences without coming across It. Peter, when he wrote his first letter, wrote it under the mastery of grace. In every section of the letter the word occurs. In his second letter, he opened with it, and he closed with it. John's use of the word is very rare. He was very reticent in his use of it. He seems to have reserved it for special use, for special occasions; and then to have left it to shed its own radiance over reaches in which he was always thinking in its atmosphere. We find i.t at the beginning of his Gospel:

We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. … And of His fullness we all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

He never used it again in that writing, but the whole of it shines and shimmers in the light of it. In his first letter, grace is not mentioned. In his second letter, he employed it in greeting the elect lady. In the Apocalypse, the word is at the portal. He greeted those to whom he writes by using it. It is never mentioned again through all the mystic movements of the visions, until he has done, and then he wrote: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints."

Paul, thinker, dialectician, theologian, statesman, must use the word perpetually to keep his spirit right, to reveal to those who should read his writings how he reveled in the glory of the infinite grace. Peter used it as the average man will use it. He is the typical human. John, who, I think, knew more about it than any of them, reserved it, was reticent about it, put it in here and there, so that the light of it flashes everywhere.

In order to gain an impression of what they meant by grace, we will take three passages, one from each of their writings, passages which I think are supreme in the revelation of what each understood by grace.

Let us begin with Paul. "The grace of God has had its epiphany, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to the end that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly … looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ."

That is Paul's central word about grace. He first declared that grace hath appeared, has had its epiphany. Then he declared three things about the activity of grace, and they are all indicated by participles. The grace of God hath appeared; bringing, instructing, looking! Bringing salvation to men; instructing those who receive salvation, to the intent that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts they should live soberly, righteously, godly; looking for the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. This is Paul's concept of the activities of Grace. It brings salvation to men; it patiently instructs saved men through life; it looks for its issue to the second advent, the epiphany of the glory when God's victory shall be won.

Peter's central word is a phrase: "The manifold grace of God!" That may be literally translated, "The many-coloured grace of God." This fisherman, this practical soul, this man who stood in perpetual contrast to the dreamers, said one of the most poetic things about grace. The practical man became a poet. Grace made him a poet. When I read this, the word arrested me, and I thought that I remembered that Peter had used it before. At the beginning of the letter I found it. Many-coloured temptations. Over against that, at the close of the letter, he put many-coloured grace. Now where are my artist friends? I want them to think that out, and tell us all it means. I have seen some wonderful colours shining in and through it. Many-coloured temptations. The yellow temptation of jealousy. The red temptation of passion. Many-coloured grace. Heavenly blue shining down upon the yellow. Now, let the artists tell us what happens. When the blue falls upon the yellow we have the green of perfect earthly peace. When the heavenly blue shines on the red of earthly passion, what happens? Then appears the purple of priesthood and of royalty. Many-coloured grace falling upon many-coloured temptations; transmuting the yellow and the red into the green and the purple by the infinite mystic witchery of heaven's transfiguring love. Grace is the eternal rainbow of hope across all the arching blackness of the darkest day.

John, being a poet and a true mystic, wrote so simply, that it is difficult at first to grasp the infinitude that lies within the compass of his simple language. John's great passage about grace is found in the prologue to his Gospel: "The Word became flesh, and pitched His tent among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." That is so simple that if we are not careful, we read it hurriedly and miss its sublimity. It is the simplicity of perfect poetry and the uttermost mysticism. John says in effect: Do you want to know what grace means? Look at Jesus! Behold Him, handle Him, listen to Him; and whether it be in the tears and tenderness of His eyes, or in the tones of His voice, or the vibrant holy anger of His accent, you are seeing grace! The grace of God was manifested in the Son of God.

Tell me, Paul, what is grace? Grace is the activity that saves, and instructs, and lights the dark horizon with the victory of the ultimate glory. Tell me, Peter, what is grace? The manifold colours of God, by which in mystic alchemy He transmutes the manifold colours of passion, and makes them contribute to the making of a man. Tell me, John, what is grace? Jesus! There is nothing more to be said.

From all these statements let us attempt to understand what grace really is. Grace is the activity of God. First, it is the activity which is of His very nature, which He cannot help or prevent because of what He is. Grace is love desiring to realize in every life the beauty of holiness, because in the realization of the beauty of holiness life finds its ultimate beauty and joy. Grace is not a quality in God which makes Him want to excuse sin. Grace is that love of His heart that intensely desires the highest, the best, the most glorious for men. Grace, therefore, is that which inspires and dominates His will. His will is inspired by His nature, and, therefore, "He willeth not the death of a sinner but rather that all should turn to Him and live." Therefore, grace proceeds to the accomplishment of its high purpose at all costs, and that means the cross. Oh simple words, so often said; yet what they mean no tongue can tell: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." "He," the Son of God, "loved me and gave Himself for me." That is grace bringing salvation to men; instructing them patiently through the days in which they blunder, fall and fail; all the while lighting the distant sky with the promise of the advent, and the victory of glory.

That is grace, and it is manifold grace. There are colours breaking out from it perpetually. Grace is the rainbow, singing in tones of silent beauty its eternal anthem of final restoration.

Let us conclude by thinking of the effect that grace had upon these three men, as this is revealed in the fact that they wrote these words under such circumstances. Observe first their perfect personal satisfaction, Paul was in prison. Death was coming, and he wrote about it. "I am already being offered." But that is not all he wrote. He added, "The time of my departure is at hand." Departure is a nautical word. The time of my putting out to sea is at hand! But surely that was a mistake! He surely meant that he was approaching the harbour! He meant nothing of the kind. The Christian view of death is not that of reaching port. It is that of putting out to sea. Do you know Kipling's "Ship That Found Itself"? When did the ship find itself? In harbour? No, but upon the mighty deep. Departure is not running into harbour away from storms. It is going out into all the splendour of life. Is not there a hymn that opens something like this?

Safe home, safe home in port!

and continues about:

Rent cordage, tattered sails,

And only not a wreck.

Miserable hymn! Terrible idea of dying! That is not the way. Paul thought of the end. Said he: "I am already being offered. The time of my putting out to the deep is at hand." Paul, how are you going to finish this letter? I shall finish on the note of grace! Nothing else matters. But you are in prison? Grace is painting pictures upon the walls of the prison that make it more beautiful than the palace of a king. I am departing and the crown awaits me. I am perfectly content with grace! "Grace be with you! "

Peter also was going. He knew that he was about to die a violent death. Tradition has it that he requested that he might be crucified head downward because he did not feel himself worthy to be crucified as his Lord was crucified. That may be true or not, I do not know. But this I know. Looking on, he said that he was going, and then he added this significant word: "As the Lord signified unto me." When he wrote that, in memory he was back by the sea of Galilee. He was remembering the early morning after the bad night of fishing; and he was listening to his Master saying to him: "Peter, when you were young you girded yourself, and you chose the way which pleased you; but when you are old someone else will gird you, and lead you where you do not desire to go!" John tells us He spoke signifying what death he should die. But the last thing Jesus had said was, "Follow Me!" Therefore, when Peter looked to the end, and saw it coming, he knew he would be crucified, but he knew that his Master had said it, that grace had arranged it! The colours playing out of the rainbow of grace made all the dark and the drab, purple with the promise of the day. He was perfectly content.

John wrote about tribulation. He said: "I am your brother; I am your companion in tribulation" But in that word there was not one note of complaint. To tribulation he added another word - And kingdom! And then another - And endurance in Jesus Christ.

These men had no personal anxieties! They knew the future: a dungeon, and loneliness, and death. But these things did not matter. The dungeon was made beautiful with the light of everlasting grace. Loneliness was canceled by the comradeship of the Lord of Grace. Death was transfigured with the glory of the manifold grace of God.

But again, I see the abounding confidence of all these men in the sufficiency of grace for the people of God.

Paul was writing to one man, a man who was in a place of peril, taking oversight of the church in Ephesus. He was giving him very careful instructions as to how he was to behave; and concerning his work, his church, and his responsibility as pastor. Now he knew that he must leave him in Ephesus, but there was no need to be anxious. "The grace of God be with you." Paul knew that grace was all that Timothy needed in Ephesus.

Peter was thinking in his writing, of the people of God in the time of their trial and difficulty, and his last word to them was this: "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." There was nothing else that mattered. He knew that nothing could harm them if they grew in that grace. Peter did not mean that they were to grow more gracious, though that would certainly result. He meant that, being in the grace, they were to grow. They were in grace; now, being in it, they were to grow in answer to it, they were to develop in response to its suggestiveness; they were to walk in its many-coloured light, and they were to do all that, by getting to know more and yet more perfectly Christ Jesus. Peter was perfectly content to leave them there.

John was thinking of all the saints. Grace is at the portal of the Apocalypse, and grace is its closing word. I go through that strange and wonderful book, and I think of the saints, waiting, watching, working, amid the terrific and bestial forces of evil in their dire and devilish conflicts. John, tell me, how can they endure? "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints." John is perfectly at rest about the saints if that be so.

If these men had personal satisfaction, and abounding confidence in the sufficiency of grace for the people of God, they were all intensely desirous for the people of God, that grace might be with them, and that being therein, they might respond to its influence, and grow in its power.

And so, the historic references of the New Testament end in prevailing clouds and darkness, but all of them are illuminated by the light of grace. Thus it will ever be, until this period, ushered in by the epiphany of grace, shall triumphantly merge into that new period which will be inaugurated by the epiphany of glory. Therefore, we conclude once more with the wonderful words: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Spirit, be with us now, and forevermore. Amen."