**VOLUME 5; CHAPTER 06 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE PASSION-BAPTISM by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what do I desire, if it is already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished.*

*Luke 12:49,50*

IN THE CALENDAR OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH THIS IS spoken of as Passion Sunday. The day has been devoted to the Church's contemplation of those sorrows of our Lord which, in human history and to human observation, culminated in the Cross.

I propose to ask you to meditate with me through the medium of these words of Jesus, on our Lord's thought of his Cross, in those days when His face was steadfastly set toward Jerusalem.

Perhaps there is no passage in the gospel narratives which has suffered more difficulty of translation than this. It is one in which absolutely literal translation would almost result in misinterpretation. A reverent translation into our more modern speech, greatly helps us. In Weymouth's Testament the text reads thus:

I came to throw fire upon the earth, and what is My desire? Oh that it were even now kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo; and how am I pent up till it is accomplished!

These words constitute what I venture to describe as a soliloquy of Jesus. By that I mean they were not addressed directly to the crowd; nor directly, even to His own disciples. They occur in the midst of a set discourse, but they stand alone. You can omit them entirely, and that particular discourse is not interfered with, its meaning is not hampered, it abides. In the midst of it He broke out into these words. I would venture, very reverently, to describe this soliloquy of Jesus as a heart-burst.

Let us look at the chapter. It opens thus, "In the meantime, when the many thousands of the multitude were gathered together … He began to say unto His disciples first of all." He was speaking in the presence of the multitudes, but first of all to His disciples. The discourse runs quietly on until we come to the thirteenth verse where we find the first interruption, "One of the multitude said unto Him, Master, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me." The Lord answered with a parable. At verse twenty-two He resumes the discourse to His disciples, "And He said unto His disciples ... "; and proceeds quietly, until He is again disturbed, not this time by one of the multitude, but by one of the disciples, "Peter said, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even unto all?" The Lord answered Peter with a parable. Now let us link verse forty-eight with verse fifty- one, and by so doing we find the true connection of the discourse. Between those two verses lie the words of my text.

If all this is somewhat tedious, it is absolutely important. It is only as we can get back into the very atmosphere of the occasion upon which our Lord uttered these words that we can hope to come into full sympathy with them, or into anything like intelligent understanding of their meaning.

Earlier in the gospel story it is declared that He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. He is on His way to the Cross. He is traversing the Via Dolorosa. His own soul is filled with sorrow, and He is talking to His disciples. A man in the multitude interrupts Him, "Master, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me." He rebukes him for his sordidness and resumes His discourse. Peter interrupts Him. He answers Peter in a parable; and there breaks in upon His soul anew His perpetual consciousness of how dull His disciples and the multitudes are. The man who said "Bid my brother divide the inheritance with me" is typical of the crowd, and they do not understand Him at all. They imagine He is there to be a divider of property, a mere social reformer. His own disciples did not understand. Peter said, "Is this parable for us, or for the rest? Is there no difference between us?" While patiently instructing their dullness, the abiding sense of their dullness and of His own limitation, finds expression in a great heart-burst; "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what do I desire, if it is already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished."

Jesus was straitened, so straitened that the disciples could not understand Him; so straitened that the jostling crowd misinterpreted Him. Reverently, let me say the whole thing. He was eager for His Cross, because He knew that apart from that He could not fulfil His mission.

Mark the opening words of this soliloquy. "I came to cast fire upon the earth." In the third chapter of this gospel, Luke tells us how His forerunner, John the Baptist, had declared to the multitudes who listened to him, "I indeed baptize you with water; but there cometh He that is mightier than I, the latchet of Whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." I turn to the second treatise of Luke, which we call the Acts of the Apostles, and I listen to Jesus now on the other side of His Cross and resurrection, and He says, referring to the very words of the forerunner, "John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." I turn over the page and come to the second chapter, "And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly, there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." That was the historic fulfilment of the prediction of John; the Holy Ghost came and they were baptized, and the symbol of His coming was fire.

Between the prophecy of the forerunner and the historic fulfilment occurred the soliloquy of Jesus, in which in effect He said, "I cannot fulfil John's prediction, I cannot cast the fire that purifies, energizes, and remakes; that enlightens the darkened intellect, enkindles the deadened emotion, energizes the degraded will, until I have been baptized with My own baptism." Pentecost cannot precede the Cross.

That is the theme of the soliloquy. Let us reverently tarry in the presence of the great words, conscious in every word that I utter, and to which you in your reverent patience will listen, that the last things can never be said about that baptism. Yet, let us listen to these words of Jesus because in them there is an unfolding of truth about the passion and the Cross which is full of value.

This fact of the coming Cross was perpetually present to the mind of Christ. He never told His disciples about His Cross until after Peter's great confession; but there are evidences in the early story that He knew of it, and that He was moving toward it, not as a victim, but as a Victor; not yielding Himself to an ultimate disaster because He was helpless, but moving with determination toward the ultimate process, and the final victory.

John tells us that at the commencement of His public ministry He entered the temple and cleansed it. They challenged Him; "What sign shewest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things?" His answer was strange and mysterious. He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They, materialized as they were, imagined that He was speaking of the temple in the midst of which men were still worshipping. In the days of Pentecostal illumination that speech of Jesus was understood by His disciples, and writing long afterwards in the light of the spiritual interpretation, John declared "He spake of the temple of His body." I look back at that scene and I see Him cleansing the temple; and find that when men asked Him what was His authority for so doing, He answered, not so that they could then understand, but out of His own consciousness, My authority for cleansing the temple, and restoring it to its true purpose is the authority of My coming Cross and My ultimate resurrection.

Again, sitting in the quietness of a starlit night upon the roof of an Eastern house, He conversed with Nicodemus. In honest and splendid perplexity, the inquirer asked, "How can these things be? How can a man be born when he is old?" Jesus, borrowing an illustration from the ancient literature of the religion to which this man belonged, said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth may in Him have eternal life." Nicodemus could not understand the answer then, but in effect the Master said, "You ask Me, how a man can be born again, how he can receive new life which shall master and negative all his old life, and My reply is that only by the way of My death, only by My lifting up on the Cross shall I ever be able to communicate My life. You cannot see My life, without My dying. In its truth and grace and glory you never can share it save as I die." The Cross was in His heart when He talked with Nicodemus.

Passing over the earlier days, we come to the glorious scene on the mount of transfiguration; and the theme of His conversation with the heavenly visitors, Moses and Elijah, was that of the exodus which He should accomplish, His Cross and His resurrection.

When the Greeks found Him, and the disciples told Him, "The Greeks desire to see Thee," He said this strange and startling thing, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone ; but if it die, it beareth much fruit. He that loveth His life loseth it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." That is to say, He had declared that if the Greeks desired to see Him and enter into understanding of what He was they could never do so until He was dead and risen. In newness of life won out of death would they behold Him.

These are illustrations taken almost at haphazard from the ministry of Jesus showing that the Cross was ever present in His mind.

In this soliloquy He tells us why it was ever present, as He reveals His own estimate, first as to its necessity; and secondly, insofar as we are able to grasp it, as to its nature.

Let us notice first then the teaching of this word of Jesus concerning the necessity for His Cross. "I am straitened." The difficulty here is lest, in attempting exposition, by multiplicity of words one should darken counsel. I find many expositors teach that our Lord was here speaking of His own sorrows. The word "straitened," however, reveals the reason of the sorrows, which is infinitely more than a declaration of the fact. "I am straitened"; that is I am confined, imprisoned, shut up, limited; or as Dr. Weymouth has it "pent up."

It was a remarkable thing for Him to say. There He stood amid His disciples, a fair and perfect Example; there He stood, the final moral Teacher of all the centuries, and yet He said, "I am straitened"; I cannot do My work, I cannot complete My work; I am unable to communicate My life, the dynamic force that will enable men to obey the teaching, and to imitate the Example.

He was straitened in His teaching. "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them yet." He was straitened in His work. "Greater works than these shall ye do, because I go to My Father." There He stood in the midst of a world full of sorrow and sighing and sin, longing to cast that fire on the earth which should purify and energize and remake, yet unable to do it; quite able to teach, to present the ideal, but these were not the things for which He had finally come, for these are quite useless alone.

If I am told today that it is my business to preach the ethic of Jesus, and that is enough; if I am told that all the Christian preacher ought to do is to call men to imitation of the great Example, and that is sufficient; my reply can only be that such opinion is out of harmony with the opinion of Jesus Himself. He did here clearly affirm, that while He was a Teacher and an Example, and only these, He was straitened, unable to do the ultimate thing for which He had come, unable to accomplish the great work upon which His heart was set. He came, not merely to give men an example, not merely to enunciate an ethic, but to cast fire, the symbol of purity, the symbol of power; fire for cleansing, for energy; but He could not do so until He was baptized with His baptism. When He uttered these words, He was waiting for, setting His face steadfastly toward, that whelming in darkness, the inner and deepest mystery of which none of us can ever fathom or understand; and He said, "I cannot complete My work, cannot scatter this purifying, energizing fire, cannot open these blind eyes, touch these cold hearts, and remake these shriveled powers, save by the way of My Cross." In these words we have revealed our Lord's sense of the necessity for the Cross.

More reverently still, and with softer footfall, let us examine the light which this soliloquy throws on the nature of the Cross. The passion baptism was to be a baptism through which it should be possible for Him to open those blind eyes, and unstop those deaf ears, to make these men understand the things He could not now make them understand, The word itself is suggestive, "I have a baptism." There is only one meaning for the word, and that is immersion or whelming. That toward which He was going was not an experience in which He would stand by the awful silence of a dead sea, and taste its brackish waters. That to which He was going was an hour in which He would fathom its depths, and enter into spiritual and profound fulfilment of that which had been written long before, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." Apart from that whelming in death and in darkness, He could not complete His work; but by that way, He was able to scatter fire, and fulfil His purpose.

If, then, by way of that whelming He was able to fulfil His purpose, we know this much at least, that it was a baptism in which He was able, in some mystic mystery of Divine wisdom and power, to deal with the forces that spoil humanity, to deal with that which, in the spiritual life of man, has produced blindness and inability.

There they stood about Him; His disciples looking at Him with wide open eyes of loving human affection, yet never seeing Him; listening to the words He said with reverent attention, and yet never hearing! The multitudes day by day listened to His teaching, watched Him healing, and imagined He had come to divide property! He said, "Only by the way of the Cross can I fulfil My mission, but by way of the Cross I will open these eyes that they may see, open these ears that they may hear, touch these hearts that they may understand the deep spiritual meaning of My mission. I have come for the remaking, not of accidentals, but of essentials; and through the remaking of the essentials for the remaking of the accidentals. I have not come to divide as between human inheritances, but to put men right with God, and right with each other, that so they may divide their inheritances upon a spiritual basis."

It was only by the way of the Cross, according to His own estimate, that He could accomplish that work. Fire, illuminative, energizing; clarifying the vision, making the pulses of the soul beat, and making eternity a reality; could only be given, said Christ, by the way of His Cross. What- ever we may think about the Cross, that is what He thought about it. It was only by His Cross; by His whelming in death; by His immersion in immeasurable and unutterable anguish and sorrow; that He could take hold of the poison which had spoiled humanity, and negate it, make it not to be, cancel it, destroy it, and so liberate the fire and remake humanity.

We cannot end with the text. Our Lord and Master is no longer saying in the midst of human history, "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what do I desire? Would that it were already kindled? But I, have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished."

These are not the words of Jesus here and now. In reverence I change His words, as in His presence I utter them. He is saying now, "I came to cast fire upon the earth, and lo, it is kindled! I have cast it because I have been baptized with My baptism; and therefore, I am no longer straitened." We have not to do with the straitened Christ, but with the unstraitened Christ. We are not listening to the teaching of Christ under circumstances of limitation because the Cross was not accomplished. The teaching is the same; but we are dealing with Christ on the other side of the Cross, so that He is able not only to teach but to give power to obey. We have not to deal with a Christ, upon the wonder of Whose pure and strong and glorious life we look with amazement and then become conscious of our own inability to copy Him or be like Him. We have to do with a Christ Who brings to us an ideal that captures our admiration; and Who then touches us with power so that each of us says, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Let us ever bring into our religious thinking the historic sense, and let us remember that our Lord passed to the passion baptism, was whelmed beneath the infinite mystery of those dark waters; and that He emerged from them in Resurrection, ascended on high, and led captivity captive, and received gifts for men, and scattered the fire; and therefore, we may share that gift immediately, and so enter into all the fullness of the meaning of His mission. He is straitened no longer.

"He Who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

"All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."

He "giveth us richly all things to enjoy."

All that is the result of His passion-baptism. Christianity is not one perpetual agony of sorrow. Your Christianity is not witnessed to by the misery of your countenance. God has freely given us all things, and that to enjoy. All things are ours to enjoy because He went to His Cross. It is by way of the tree that the leaves of healing come. It is by the way of the Cross that the crown is placed upon our brows. It is by the way of passion-whelming, that the baptism comes to us which is the baptism of fire, of purity, and of energy.

Now let me make the final application. There is a sense in which this soliloquy of Jesus is one which we must make our own. If we would enter into life, we also have to say - and yet I pause again to interpolate this warning, let us be very careful of the sense in which this thing is said - "l have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished."

I take you back to the chapter we read in Mark. Jesus had His face set toward Jerusalem, toward the Cross and the suffering. He was telling His disciples that He must go to suffering, that He must be killed and the third day rise again, when there came to Him James and John - Matthew says their mother spoke for them - and asked Him to grant them whatever they wished. And He answered, "What is it that you would ask of Me?" Then they said this, "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and one on Thy left, in Thy glory." He replied, "Ye know not what ye ask, Are ye able to drink the cup that I drink? or to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said, "We are able." Is not that the profoundest proof of the fact that Jesus was straitened and unable to make men understand? Think of that answer of James and John, "We are able."

Yet, what did He say? "The cup that I drink ye shall drink; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized." What did He mean? If what we have been saying is true, that He drank of the cup in unutterable loneliness, that His great passion-baptism was isolated and alone, a whelming in which none could possibly share, then what did He mean when He said this to these two men? It was the word of His Grace. It was the declaration that while He would tread the winepress alone, He would carry them with Him into the midst of the sorrow vicariously, and bring them into new life by standing in their place in death. Paul said, "We have been crucified with Him." Historically Paul's hands were not nailed to the Cross; but His hands were nailed to the Cross. Essentially, Paul never went out into the infinite and awful mystery of atoning death, nor could he, nor can I, nor can you; but Paul was crucified with Him. He had gathered Paul into His own personality and heart. He was infinitely more than Man in Himself, He was the sum total of the people He had gathered into His own personality, the sum total of humanity, and in that strange hour of His baptism there also was I baptized. In that strange hour in which He drank the cup, there also I, in Him, drank the cup. You shall drink of My cup, you shall be baptized with My baptism. You cannot drink the cup alone, you cannot be baptized alone or independently or separated from Me, but in Me you shall drink the cup and be baptized with the baptism.

It is as though He had said, "I am going into this baptism not for Myself but for you." The old terms of the theologians must be retained. His death was vicarious.

That is where you and I must begin to live if we would live at all in spiritual fullness. If I declare that there are senses in which we can and must say, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished," I do not mean that by my identification with His Cross in self-surrender I find my way into life. There is a very subtle peril abroad in much of the finest devotional literature of the day; I hear men talking about their identification with Christ as though there were some value in it. There is no value in it. Everything must be of grace. I shall have to come on the last day of life to His Cross, saying, "Nothing in my hand I bring." Because I bear in my body brands that speak of suffering for Him, I am no more worthy of His salvation. Neither the brands I bear, nor the suffering I share, bring me nearer to God. When at last I lay my head on the pillow at the close of the one short day of work I can render to God, I shall die a sinner saved by grace, and in no other way shall I enter into life. Not by the merit of my service, not by self-denials, not by the cross I carry shall I ever enter heaven; but by His baptism and by His cup of sorrow drunk to the dregs. So only shall I ever come into life beyond, and so only can I ever enter into life here.

Those powers of which you boast yourself, those splendid capacities of your magnificent humanity - the anthems of them are being sung in every magazine today; but know this, that the dawning will darken to midnight unless you enter into life by the way of Christ's Cross.

There it stands in the midst of the centuries, the one and only hope of humanity, and only by taking my life from Him as a gift purchased in the mystery of His passion-whelming, can I ever find its fulfilment according to the purpose of God.

But this is the last word of all. The passion is accomplished, the victory is won, the fire is scattered. This is the day of Pentecost. Every man in this house can leave the sanctuary with fire which will enable him to say, to do, to be, to the glory of His name.