**VOLUME 5; CHAPTER 08 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**DEATH ABOLISHED by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Our Saviour Jesus Christ, Who abolished death.*

*2 Timothy 1:10*

WE COME TO EASTER MORNING WITH JOY AND GLADNESS, and with a great sense of triumph filling our hearts. We have been treading the shadowed way that led to Calvary, and standing in awe and amazement in the presence of the infinite mystery of the passion of our Lord. This morning in our hearts there is the assurance that the winter is over and gone, and the time of the singing of birds is come. The storm has spent itself, the great Master Mariner is triumphant, and the Ark rides upon the waves of a sunlit sea. Egypt is behind, the exodus is accomplished. Death is abolished, life and incorruption are brought to light.

It was the brilliant German critic of Christianity, Strauss, who declared that of the Christian faith the resurrection is the center of the center, and that is true. "If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain ... ye are yet in your sins … if in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most- pitiable," for our hope has been the greatest of hopes, and our despair must be the most unutterable of despairs.

Christ is risen; and His resurrection was first of all, as to His own mission, perfect vindication of Himself, the proof, in the cosmic order, of His sinlessness. It was also the vindication of all His teaching; He had affirmed through the days of His public ministry - and men had listened to the affirmation and had refused to believe it and had crucified Him eventually for making it - that the supreme thing in human life is the spirit, "Be not afraid of them which kill the body, and have no more that they can do"; speaking out of His own essential spirit life He said, "I lay down My life, that I may take it again," "I will go up to that which men call death, and you shall see Me die, but I, the essential spirit will take hold of My body, and bring it back again that you may behold it." When He was laid by loving hands in the grave, His enemies said, "We remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, 'After three days I rise again' " - and if He never rose they were quite right, He was a deceiver; but the resurrection demonstrates the truth of His own teaching, that in the economy of God the spirit life is independent of the body, is able again at the time appointed to re-clothe itself with the body, because it is the dominant factor in personality. The value of the resurrection in the mission of Christ is that of its perfect vindication of Himself, of His teaching, of His power.

The value of the resurrection to the sons of men is, therefore, necessarily that of demonstration. By that resurrection I know that my sins are forgiven. Blot out that historic resurrection and the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins is a sigh of hope without foundation in fact upon which faith can fasten. By that resurrection I know that the Cross is the means by which my sins may be forgiven, That resurrection is the demonstration of the possibility of a holy life, for He Who said, "I lay down My life, that I may take it again," said "I lay down My life for the sheep." In the energy of that communicated life we live that we may become holy. If He rose not, it is a false dream. By that resurrection there is assurance of the life beyond, and illumination thereof for all time. It is to that last thought that we turn this morning.

The text appears in a paragraph, the burden of which is Paul's appeal to Timothy to be brave and true in the testimony of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole paragraph makes perfectly clear that the central fact of the gospel, that which indeed is the gospel, is the fact of the appearing, or the epiphany of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That is the gospel which Paul preached, the gospel committed to Timothy, the gospel of the Church.

The central fact of that manifestation or appearing is that of the resurrection. Here the apostle describes the resurrection as the abolition of death, victory over death. He moreover declares that, by the way of the resurrection, life and incorruption were brought to light in the gospel.

Death is abolished by that illumination. That illumination results from that abolition.

Let us remind ourselves briefly, and with all patience and sympathy, of the fact that the fear of death is not only widespread but it may be described as universal. Man does fear death. You remember the words in which Shakespeare describes death:

Death is a fearful thing.

The weariest and most loathed earthly life,

That age, ache, penury and imprisonment

Can lay on nature, is a paradise

To what men fear of death.

Or the words in which Young describes it,

The Vale of Death! that hushed Cimmerian vale,

Where darkness, brooding o'er unfinished fates

With raven wing incumbent, waits the day,

(Dread day!) that interdicts all future change.

Or to go back to literature more ancient than either, more sublime than either, the literature of our own Bible. Listen to the voice of perhaps the oldest book in the Bible, and hear how Job in the midst of his agony thus describes death:

… The land of darkness, and of the shadow of death;

A land of thick darkness, as darkness itself;

A land of the shadow of death without any order,

And where the light is as darkness.

I quote these not as illustrating the lower manifestations of fear, but the higher; they are records of this universal fear, from the highest of men.

This fear of death still abides very largely, even among the children of God, the children of light. Perchance it is the last fear to be overcome in the heart of the trusting saint, as death is the last enemy to be overcome. We are conscious of the chill of it even though we live in the warmth of the risen Sun of righteousness. There is a sense in which this fear haunts us and abides even after we have seen life and immortality brought to light in the gospel.

May we reverently ask the reasons of the fear? What fills the heart with fear in the presence of death, either our own death or that of our loved ones? First of all, let us remember that even if we believe man is immortal, it is still true that death is the passage from the familiar into the unfamiliar. We do not know what lies beyond; it is the bourn whence no traveler returneth. We have all felt the terror of that as we have stood by the side of the loved one about to cross over. It is the leaving of the familiar and the reaching of the unfamiliar. It is the severing of associations, and the ending of fellowships. It is the interruption of plans and purposes. and the cessation of endeavor. These are things against which men find themselves in revolt. These are the things which make men afraid, These are the reasons why man does so perpetually and so persistently fight against death.

What is the reason of these reasons? What lies behind all this? How are we to account for it? This same apostle in his Corinthian letter dealing with the subject of resurrection, makes this affirmation, "the sting of death is sin." The fear of death is the last activity of conscience. Conscience, deadened, hardened, seared, acts in the presence of death. Conscience asserts continuity, and in a moment fear takes possession of the soul. Do not misunderstand me at this point. I do not say that fear of death is the fear of punishment for sin in the next world. That is not my argument now. Conscience asserts continuity, and when the spirit contemplates continuity after this strange dividing line of death, and believes that death is but the passing on from the familiar into the unfamiliar, the severing of old associations, the ending of old fellowships, the interruption of plans and purposes, the cessation of endeavor, then the soul is in revolt, the emotions are stirred with fear, but why? Because through sin man has lost his vision of himself, of the meaning of his life, and of the things that lie beyond; because man looking out at death is blind and cannot see death as it really is in the economy and purpose of God. All the reasons which I have assigned for fear, which are true reasons, are, nevertheless, false as in themselves. Death need not be, nor ought to be, the passage from the familiar to the unfamiliar; Death is not the severing of association, the ending of fellowship; it is not the interruption of plan and purpose, and the cessation of endeavor; unless all these things are out of harmony with the ages and with the God of the ages, and the purpose of the ages. If a man shall live out his life of three-score years and ten simply in the realm of the dust, or even if a child, or a youth shall so live, as the result of faulty teaching of fathers, mothers, teachers, all these reasons for fear are there.

Now the declaration of this text is not that Christ destroyed death, but that He abolished it. The declaration is that He made death idle by bringing life and incorruption to light through the gospel. This Greek word is translated in other places in the New Testament, "made of no effect." That is the true thought here. He has made death of no effect. He has made death void, empty. He has emptied death of all that which filled the heart with fear.

Let us see how this has been done. What was the way of His victory? First of all, in His own personal resurrection He abolished death. I am not dealing at all with that infinite mystery of the Cross which preceded resurrection. It was not in the hour of resurrection that He made atonement. It was in the act and article of death that He atoned. In His resurrection, He, the permanent, the continuous, the spirit, the essential, took His body out of the tomb, leaving the grave-clothes absolutely undisturbed, and leaving the stone still in its place. The grave-clothes were not, as we have sometimes interpreted the story, folded up tidily in one place; they were in the actual wrappings in which they had been about His body; the napkin was not with the grave-clothes, but in a place by itself, apart, exactly where it had been about His sacred head. He had left the grave-clothes unmoved, every fold as it was around His body; and the stone still there. It was when John and Peter saw those undisturbed grave-clothes that they believed He had risen. If they had seen the grave- clothes carefully folded and smoothed, they would have thought someone had stolen the body; but when they saw them wrapped as they had been about the body, still there and the body gone, they believed. An angel rolled back that revolving stone that men might see that He was not there. In that article of resurrection He, the permanent, persistent spirit, the essential Jesus as Man, took again that body, and by the touch of His spirit so transformed it that it was no longer subject to the laws which are only of the material, but became the spiritual body of which Paul speaks in his great Corinthian letter. Thus in resurrection He abolished death, made it null and void, made it of no effect. He demonstrated for all time the fact that there is a life than can and will master death eventually, even on the physical plane.

He tarried for forty days, showing Himself as alive from the dead. Have you studied the brief story of those forty days? It is a wonderful unveiling of life and incorruption. He merged the familiar and the unfamiliar. We are afraid of death because we are leaving familiar things and going to unfamiliar; and for forty days He merged them in each other, perpetually comforting, startling, satisfying, and surprising. The doors are locked for fear of the Jews, no bolt is shot back, and He is there, and you can put your finger in the print of the nails. He merged the familiar with the unfamiliar.

He demonstrated identity, continuity, mastery over death. They had seen Him die, they knew He was dead upon the Cross, but He is alive. There He is, and in His feet and hands are wound-prints, and His side; but doors cannot retain Him. He can walk by their side, so close to them that they can listen to Him but do not know Him, all the way to Emmaus; then He will break bread and they will see Him, and just as they would hold Him, He is gone. Do not try to get rid of these last two chapters of John. The light is never clearer than in these two chapters. He is merging the familiar with the unfamiliar. He is saying to us, "You speak of going to unfamiliar things, just over the line they are there, all the old things, but there are other things you cannot quite understand, I will give you glimpses of them that you will never forget when your loved ones go; strange mysteries of being you cannot understand, but they are the same; even the wound-prints are there."

He demonstrated the continuity of association and fellowship: There are things I dare not try to say, as I think He said them; I have to say them roughly, for imitation would be sacrilege. I can always hear how He uttered that woman's name that morning, "Mary." She knew Him then. "Rabboni, Master, it is Thou! Yes, you have not lost Me." She would have clutched Him, but He said, "No, Mary, you will have to learn to depend not upon the touch of flesh, but upon communion of spirit. The associations are not broken, My Father and your Father, My God and your God. You will have to learn to do without the touch of the flesh, Mary; that is all."

He revealed the unity of plan and purpose here and beyond. What was the passion of His heart while here? The Kingdom of God, the salvation of men. "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." He stayed long enough to say to His disciples, The plan is the same, the purpose is the same, the endeavor is the same; I out of sight, you in sight, are going into partnership. "Ye shall be My witnesses … to the uttermost part of the earth."

If that was the personal action in the abolition of death, what was the relative action? Again I quote from the Corinthian letter, for in these words the whole argument is stated more briefly and forcefully than I can hope to state it, "The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." In the darkness and mystery of His Cross He so dealt with sin as to be able to whisper to my sinful soul the word of absolution and the word of peace, so as to give me a conscience void of offence toward God. Directly, you have a conscience void of offence toward God; you have a new vision of God, a new vision of yourself and a new vision of the hereafter; and death who had stood before you stern, hard, iron, brutal, cold, is as you look transfigured into an angel of mercy whose kiss is the kiss of love, the porter forevermore at the gate of life, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory."

What is this victory in our outlook on death? Christ put Himself where death had been standing. This is His word to the Christian, "Till I come." This is His word to the Christian through His servant and by inspiration, "Absent from the body, at home with the Lord." We looked for death, but we are not looking for death today, we are looking for Him, and even if, presently, by the weakening of this mortal tent in which I dwell, the loosening of its bands, my body becomes, to use the magnificent description of Longfellow when he wrote of the slave, "the worn-out fetter which the soul had broken and flung away," I shall meet my Lord. Never was finer thing written about death than that. The spirit conscious of the worn-out fetter, breaks it, flings it away, and then is at home with the Lord. So Christ stands there, where, I know not and care not, whether near or far, just over the border-line of this service, perhaps ere it is done the flaming glory of His advent feet, or perchance after a long, hard day's work, there stands, not death, king of terrors, but Christ, the King of love, and He has abolished death. Death is unemployed, idle. Christ has taken his place.

Mark the effect of this upon fear. Again you may express it in words not usually used in this connection, but I think accurately used in this connection, "Perfect love casteth our fear." The reason of the reasons of fear is gone.

My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought,

My sin, not in part, but the whole,

Was nailed to His Cross, and I bear it no more,

Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, Oh my soul.

"The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

With the passing of the reason of the reasons, the reasons also go. Men fear death because the beyond is unfamiliar; but the beyond is not unfamiliar to us. We know the country well to which the loved ones go. But you say, that is the difficulty, we do not. Think again. I am afraid the Church of God is losing that great and gracious art of contemplating the country beyond. I know that it is out of fashion to teach even children to sing about a heaven beyond the blue. It is certainly quite out of fashion for Christian people to talk about heaven. We are told to make heaven here. I believe that with all my heart. We need have no anxiety about the heaven beyond, but it is good sometimes to contemplate it. As the saintly Rutherford said, "it is good to climb and look in advance upon the home of the soul forever; to observe its buildings, its furnishings; the country, the hills and valleys." We do it all too little. This is the thing I want to say. We know the country for we argue of the country from the country's King. If you really want to know what heaven is like, get any little bit of earth where Jesus is King, and you will see it. Do not be afraid of your imagination. Flowers? Oh yes, immortals, Asphodel, never fading. Birds and animals? Surely yes; armies of white horses for the saints to ride upon. You say, "You are talking figures of speech." Quite probably so, but figures are used to help people to see facts that are too brilliant for their seeing. Facts are always finer than figures. I argue the country from the country's King. No, the country beyond is not unfamiliar. I not only know it, I am learning its language, I am gradually coming to understand its very accent. I know men and women, saints of God, who have walked and talked with Him for fifty years or more, and their accent is so much the accent of the other side that men call them foreigners. We know the country to which the loved ones have gone because we know the country's King.

We were afraid of death because death meant severing of associations and the ending of fellowships. I bring you back to this great word of the catholic Church, and I use the word in its true sense, the universal Church, the peculiar word of an older day, the communion of saints, which does not merely include the fellowship of the saints who are in the Church on earth, but the communion of all saints who have entered into rest and are beyond the vision of the senses. The communion abides; we are not divided. We are waiting, so are they. We are not yet perfected, neither are they. They are in the Paradise of God where the vision is clearer and temptations are over, and the battle is won, but they are not yet perfected. "God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." We are united in our waiting. They are waiting for that for which I am waiting, the resurrection. We cannot visit them. They cannot talk to us, and we violate the whole order of revelation when we try to do it. They cannot revisit us, I do not know that they can watch us, except perchance now and then by some special permission of heaven. There is a unity and affinity which defies and laughs at absence of articulate speech and the vision of the senses. I pass no day that I am not conscious of the nearness of at least one who entered within the veil sixteen years ago, my first lassie; but I never try to bring her up to mutter to me. I never insult the high and holy revelation of God by making use of some fleshly medium that I may hear a whisper that is from hell and not from heaven. But I know the touch of her spirit upon mine, for the spirit life cannot be measured by the dimensions of the material. I know though she cannot come to me, I shall go to her.

Not as a child shall we again behold her;

For when with raptures wild

In our embraces we again enfold her,

She will not be a child;

But a fair maiden in her Father's mansion,

Clothed in celestial grace;

And beautiful with all the soul's expansion

Shall we behold her face.

I have not lost my child, she is mine as she never was before. Did we say that death interferes with plans and purposes, and endeavor? No, there is continuity of service. They are not idle. It is death that is idle. What are they doing? I only know one thing, they are praying; what else I do not know, I will not pretend to say. This I know, They rest from their labours, but their works have gone out with them; and while the heart of their Lord is restless because His work is not completed, their hearts are restless with His restlessness. They are in perfect fellowship with Him. They have not grown callous about this world of ours, they pray. Oh, it is a great theme, I cannot exhaust it. The Lord is risen indeed, Hallelujah.

This is not the gospel of callousness. We still miss our loved ones, and we still shed tears. Our sense of loss is the result of what God made us emotionally, and we should be Iess like God if we did not miss them. Our tears He never rebukes. I miss the loved one who is leaving my home and crossing the ocean for a little while, and I have even known tears shed on such occasions. The sense of loss is not wrong when the loved one passes on, and I know I shall never again touch that dear hand until the morning of resurrection. This is not the gospel of callousness. Christ does not rebuke your tears. It is the gospel of comfort. The boy you have let go far away across the ocean, you miss him yet, but he is not as safe as the child Jesus took to be with Himself, not nearly as safe. Tears there are, but the rain of our tears in the light of the resurrection creates the rainbow which arches all the sky and is the perpetual witness to the ultimate victory.

But if Christ did not rise, all this is unutterable nonsense. Do not imagine you can retain this verse if you deny the historic Christ and the historic resurrection. It is a miracle in the midst of the ages, not natural evolution. That is not resurrection. It was triumph over tragedy, mastery over death by life in the supreme act of God for man. Deny it and you have no comfort - the thud of the clod upon the coffin and that is all. But blessed be God, He is risen, we know He is risen.

There is no song before Calvary. That is, there is no Easter song for me without Calvary. "How am I straitened till it be accomplished," that is before Calvary. Let me say this other thing. There is always the Easter song after Calvary. You cannot prevent it. You may have Pilate's mandate, and Herod's soldiers, and all hell's opposition; but the song will laugh at your opposition.

What was true in history is true of your life, You will never sing the resurrection song until you know Calvary; but to know Calvary is to know resurrection and the Easter song.

May God, the God of all comfort, send you home, especially you my beloved who are bereaved, not to be calIous or indifferent, but to know that He gilds the teardrop with His smile and makes the desert garden bloom awhile; to know that He has your loved ones safe, and that when God comes, He will bring them with Him.