**VOLUME 5; CHAPTER 11 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP: NO ABIDING CITY by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*For we have not here an abiding city.*

*Hebrews 13:14*

IT IS REPORTED THAT THE GREAT GERMAN CHANCELLOR, Bismarck, declared on one occasion that great cities are great sores upon the body politic. I do not suppose any of us who are at all familiar, experimentally with the cities of today, or from our reading, with the history of the cities of the world, will be inclined to differ from that opinion. The history of cities has through all time been the history of the gathering together of men, and the presence among them of forces which destroy. We are perpetually confronted in our dealing with human nature with two apparently contradictory impulses. The first is that of the gathering together of men into the life of the city; and the second is that of the ceaseless and almost restless desire to be away from the city.

"We have not here an abiding city," wrote this teacher of the Hebrew people, and the words, as you will remember, occur in the midst of the great argument concerning faith; its nature, its operation, its rewards; and the postponement of its final victory. The words of my text are taken from that chapter in the letter which is, as to the argument, the continuation of the teaching commenced at the close of the tenth chapter, running through the eleventh, and continuing until the close of the treatise. If we remind ourselves of the underlying teaching of that entire paragraph, we shall come to a better understanding of the meaning of our text.

The letter to the Hebrews is a letter written in order to warn men against the specific sin of unbelief. It illuminates for us, therefore, as perhaps no other writing in the Bible does, the true meaning of faith. It reveals the fact that faith is not merely intellectual apprehension and conviction of truth; and shows that faith is the assent of the will, and the yielding of the life, to the claim of the truth of which the mind is convinced. It is the letter, if I may say so, which more than any other writing of the Bible gives Biblical force and warrant to the suggestion of the title of Professor James's essay, "The Will to Believe"; showing forevermore that belief in its profoundest sense is not conviction merely, but conduct proceeding out of conviction, and harmonizing with the conviction. From beginning to end the writer has but one sin in mind, the sin of unbelief; that is, the sin of refusing to yield obedience to the claim of the truth, when the truth has brought conviction to the mind.

The positive teaching of the letter is that of the superiority of the Christian economy to all that had preceded it; the superiority of the revelation by the Son, to the ministration of angels; the superiority of the leadership of the Son, to that of Moses who led the people out but could not lead them in, and to that of Joshua who led the people in but could not give them rest; the superiority of the priesthood of the Son, to that of Aaron who perpetually repeated sacrifices which brought no peace to the conscience. After these arguments we have the illustrations of those who by faith, that is, by yielding to the claim of the truth, wrought righteousness, subdued kingdoms, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire; and marched through seas of blood and through ever darkening perils to victory; and who by their activities of faith laid all the ages under debt to them for their triumphs. In the course of that great illustrative chapter, the central thought is that these pilgrims of faith, warriors of faith, builders of faith, were forever moving forward toward the establishment of a city. Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees because in it he could find no rest, and he left it seeking a city whose Builder and Maker is God. That chapter is gathered carefully around that central word of revelation; and thus we discover that the march of these men, their pilgrimage, their warfare, their constructive passion, were inspired by the vision of a city, a city established, a city of perfect order, a city Whose Builder and Framer is God.

The eleventh chapter of the letter closes with this very significant declaration, that while these men of faith of by-gone days saw the city afar off, set their faces toward it, made persistent pilgrimage to reach it, fought opposing forces on their way, yet they never reached the goal toward which they ran, or saw the city built. "These all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect."

It would be possible to write a continuation of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews; we could gather the names of apostles, confessors, martyrs, reformers, statesmen, prophets, preachers; and if we did so, thus completing the list of the pilgrims, warriors, builders of faith; then of all those who have crossed the borderline and are out of our sight, we should still have to say, the goal is not yet reached, "these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise."

Now in order that we may take this first part of the larger text and understand it, I must tarry a moment longer to add something to that already said concerning this pilgrimage, this warfare, this passion of the men of faith. What, according to this whole contextual teaching really is the goal toward which these men ran; and toward which men of faith have ever been moving through the centuries? The hymn we sang together will mislead us unless we are careful.

I am not saying we should not sing it; there are values in the hymn and we shall continue to use it; but the idea of our hymn was that the pilgrim hosts are moving toward the heaven that lies beyond.

We are travelling home to God,

In the way the Fathers trod.

They are happy now, and we

Soon their happiness shall see.

That is not the teaching of this letter. I am not denying the reality of the heaven that lies beyond. Some day by God's good grace and by the merit of the Saviour I hope to reach it. But that is not the pilgrimage, that is not the warfare. We are not fighting to build heaven. The living Lord passed out of sight saying in infinite tenderness and pity and love and compassion to His fearful followers, "I go to prepare a place for you"; and that He will assuredly do.

What then is this pilgrimage, what is this warfare? What is the consuming passion of the men of faith? I answer that inquiry superlatively, that I may state it briefly. He has gone to prepare a place for us beyond; our business is to prepare this place for Him. The city which Abraham went to seek was not a city postponed beyond this world; but the city of God established on the earth; the city of God, the symbol of the whole wide world subdued to the Kingship of God. Toward that the men of faith have ever moved. Toward that the men of faith are moving still today. The supreme passion of faith is not the selfish desire to win heaven, but the self-emptying desire and devotion to win the earth for God.

It is not my intention now, or indeed on the three sub-sequent Sunday evenings in which I propose to tarry with this line of consideration, to deal with dispensations and methods; all these are interesting and valuable, but they are not within the province of the present consideration. We are looking at the ultimate desire, the ultimate passion, of the men of faith. It is a passion for the establishment of the Divine order, or in figurative language, for the building of the city of God. To this the whole Bible bears witness. You open it, and you are introduced quite quickly to a garden scene. You read through it, and you journey in spirit along the way of the wilderness, over which there is a highway, a way of battle and of turmoil and of strife. You come to the closing book; and you find the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem; not heaven, but a city descending out of heaven; and while you look, you hear the all-inclusive anthem, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His peoples, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." The Bible is a mirror giving us human history from the Divine standpoint, and revealing those methods of God with men, and those methods of men with God, whereby from the garden man comes ultimately to the city.

In every human being there is a sense of the city, and the desire for the city. However much we would if we could - and let me say it quite bluntly, we would if we could - keep our young people away from great cities, and let them live in the country; we cannot keep them away, the lure of the city is in the heart of the young, they crowd toward the city. I am not discussing the question from the economic standpoint, but from the human standpoint. The underlying passion for the city is according to the Divine purpose, according to the Divine will; one of the primal forces of life, one of the elemental things of human nature, from which there can be no escape.

Whether you count the Scripture lesson of this evening as poetry or history, for the moment I care nothing, I am after its central lesson. The first city the Bible names was built by Cain, a murderer, a self-centered man, whose offering was refused because he was refused. That is the first city to which the Bible refers. The naming of names will be enough to help us to see the history of cities since: Sodom, Babylon, Nineveh, Carthage, Rome, Paris, London, New York; a long, continuous succession, and always the same thing, the city expressing human failure as nothing else can; startling the ages, and inevitably passing and perishing; in the time of their existence places where evil gathers, and where Satan's seat is; then crumbling to decay.

Man is always attempting to build a city; he has never yet built a city. Why? Because man has been attempting to construct a city out of a garden, in forgetfulness of the God of the garden, and the laws of his own life in relationship to that God.

"We have not here an abiding city." Why not? Let us answer that question first, by reminding ourselves of what the Christian character really is, and what it therefore demands.

The first essential element of the Christian character is the death of self - so easily said, so imperfectly understood, so little realized - the death of self; not the destruction of self, but the death of self, so far as self is a separate personality thinking only of itself and making all outside forces minister to its own well-being and advancement. The Lord Christ begins by saying to men, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself … and follow Me." That is the central fact of Christian experience, denial of self.

The result in the economy of grace is holiness of character; purity of motive; holiness and righteousness, the two sides of the one great pure Christly character; holiness, rectitude of character; righteousness, rectitude of conduct springing out of rectitude of character. Add to these two things that one inclusive word which has in it the fire of holiness and the passion of self-denial, the great word love. These are the distinctive elements of Christian character. What is the result wherever these things are realized? A new refinement; life finding self-realization according to the original purpose of God through self-denial; life set free from all the vulgarities that spoil, and coming into realization of all the refinement and beauty of character which once had its manifestation in human history in the Person of our Lord Christ, the Man of Nazareth. And not refinement only; but that permanence which defies decay, which realizes that the things of past failure are things of no moment; which enables a man to think of death as transition merely, and to challenge the rider upon the pale horse, "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?"

What are the resultant needs of the people who share this character? A dwelling place in harmony; the congregating together of like characters; enterprise inspired only by such motives; the City of God. The presence and work of our Lord in the world was for the creation of these characteristics, and of this character. I go further, and say that the presence and work of our Lord in the world has resulted in the creation of these characteristics and of this character. Dealing with individual men, He communicates the dynamic force which produces the change; and those who are so converted, turned back again to the Divine ideal for humanity, born again, find their life centered no longer in self but in God, and are conscious of the passion for holiness without which no man can see the Lord, and feel within them the thrill and throb and driving of this great eternal life. Those who partake of these characteristics become men and women who are constrained to say, "We have not here an abiding city." The men of faith are homeless in this world, having no place where they can perfectly rest; having no place where the surroundings are in harmony with the mysterious and mighty forces of their own life, as created by their contact with this Lord Christ Himself.

Turn from that first consideration, and think of earthly cities. We have already glanced at them in general outline, having named several. Plato declared that the origin of the city was the desire of man to protect himself against marauding and wild beasts. Aristotle declared - and came far nearer to the deepest truth - that the city was the outcome of the social instinct in individual life. Moses, in the chapter I read, does not attempt to give us a philosophy; but tells the story of the building of a city; it was an attempt to make out of a garden a city, and an attempt to do it without God. Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, by which the writer did not at all attempt to suggest a localized Deity, but in figurative language spoke of a man who turned his back upon God and chose his own way, determined to carve his own fortune, and be independent of the Divine government and instruction. He went out from the presence of the Lord and built a city. In that case the city was the outcome of social instincts on the lowest levels; and men still look upon cities as opportunities for self-aggrandizement, and for ministering to covetousness. What is the history of London at this moment? Write it in one brief and burning word, the survival of the strongest - not the survival of the fittest, the fittest is not always the strongest. If you doubt it, stand any Saturday night upon the Embankment with our men who are doing work which is perhaps the most sacred of any we are trying to do, touching the flotsam and jetsam of the city, unemployable men, many of them; but mostly men unemployed as the result of the grind of brute strength flinging out weakness. If you could be divested of your accidental - or if you prefer the word providential - resources, and put down here in this great city with its tides of life and its abundant wealth, what would you do? In spite of all your education and ability, you would be ground with the rest. London is selfish to its heart and core. It is not peculiar in that. That is true of every city in the world today.

Perhaps, after all, there is no city more eloquent to the man of faith than Rome, the eternal city - oh, the irony of it! Those who have stood in Rome will understand what I mean. Rome is in three layers, pagan, ecclesiastical, modern; and the weakest of these is the modern. I am speaking materially of course. There was a strength in pagan Rome which abides until this day in spite of the overlaying of ecclesiastical Rome. There was the strength of awful cunning in ecclesiastical Rome, that abides in hoary magnificence in spite of the newer Rome that is arising. Three layers of failure; perpetual memorials of man's inability to build an eternal city without God.

Whatever city you come into, throughout the world, you will find the same thing. Why? Because of the man who builds; because the man attempting to build is self-centered and not God-centered; because at the heart of city life, varying its expression, changing its garments, altering its methods, there always sits enthroned the individualism of selfishness. Look at the advertisements on the hoardings or in the newspapers, and listen to the song of self! The Greatest Boon ever offered to the Public! The Greatest Discovery on Earth! The Largest Retail - something - in the World! Buy of Me: Take My Wares: They are the Best! What does that mean? Make me rich, whatever other man may suffer. Selfishness is everywhere.

If these are the incidental symptoms, the essential malady is godlessness, forgetfulness of God. Have you given up the story of Babel? Restore it to your Bible for it is the veritable truth. Let us make us a name! Let us be a confederacy independent of all men, and of God Himself! That is the ancient story of the Bible; but you can find it in tomorrow's newspaper in the last Trust formed, the newest monopoly cursing the earth: Selfishness! That is the history of the city. Self in its lowest forms, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life; with a neglect of all those who are unequal to the strife and the struggle. Great cities are great sores upon the body politic.

"We have not here an abiding city." And again, why not? Because there can be no harmony between the principle of self-death and the principle of selfishness; between the method of sacrificial service and the mastery of covetousness; between the determined proclamation of the evangel that declares salvation for the lost, and the determined propagation of the philosophy which is expressed in the words, the survival of the strongest. The two things contradict each other necessarily and perpetually. We have here no continuing city for we are men of faith; men who believe in God and in holiness and in love. The cities of earth are built by men of sight, attempting to do without God; who speak of sin as though it were an infirmity which does not very much matter: who prate of love but never practise it in commerce, statesmanship, or social life.

Here we have no continuing city. The conserving elements are lacking, and the corrupting elements are regnant. "Change and decay in all around I see." How often we glibly sing it; it is true also in this wider sense. We might write it over cities everywhere, over the cities of today. We may pull down our barns and build greater; but if God only comes into the life by an after-thought, by the use of the disjunctive conjunction "but," of what use are the barns and the produce laid within them, and the things in which we make our boast?

Here we have no continuing city, because the men of faith are a continuing people, those who are to put on incorruption, which cannot dwell in corruption. It is only when the elements of corruption are eliminated, and the leprosy of sin is dealt with in human life, that the city of God will be built. "Here we have not an abiding city."

What one would like to do is to preach next Sunday evening's sermon at once, for all this is preliminary. I would not like anyone to go away saying that the preacher has declared the aloofness of the men of faith; that they have no continuing city, and therefore, that they have nothing whatever to do with the cities in which they live; that they have no responsibilities concerning the cities of today, That is not the teaching of the passage, and I pray you listen to the rest of the verse, the sermon will matter little, "we seek after the city which is to come." Not we seek one that lies beyond, but we, the men of faith, discontented with things as they are, seek the city of God, moving ever towards it.

Whatever the future may have in store for us, today we have no home on earth as a people. I am convinced that the first lesson of powerful service is that of the separation indicated by the Abrahamic indices of tent and altar. There, at the center of the Hebrew line of worthies rises the great figure of Abraham who left Ur of the Chaldees and went forth to seek a city. What were the signs of his attitude? The tent and altar. The tent; easily struck, easily carried, easily pitched, and as easily struck again. The altar, wherever there is a tent, a place of worship, a place of recognition of God, a place to which to come for the renewing of vision and the communication of virtue. These two things are the symbols of the life which leads on to victory.

The measure of the separation of Christian men from the maxims and methods and motives of the cities of men is the measure in which they are able to correct the things that are wrong; to destroy the forces that destroy; to construct the city of God. We men of faith make no greater mistake than when we take up our abode in any city of earth saying: "Here are we, and of this city we are citizens"; saying in contradiction to the great word of the letter, Here we have found our abiding city! No, the tent is the symbol of the life of the man of faith; always ready to be disturbed by the Divine government, always ready to respond to the command to move away to bear witness somewhere else. That is the first lesson, but not the last, not the final one.

There is much to be done while we sojourn in the tent. We shall have to pray for Lot and for Sodom; we must go out and fight for the rescue of Lot; but there will always be Melchisedek, the Priest to meet us on our way, and minister to our needs. The first lesson is that of the tent, side by side with the altar.

The Church of God - speaking now in more general terms - can only help the nation, as she is composed of pilgrims, warriors, builders of faith who dwell in tents, and erect altars, and work with sword and with trowel for the building of the city of God.

Our only true content should be in our abiding discontent with everything unlike God. That is but another way of saying all I have been trying to say. The measure in which we sit down in the city, and are content with it, and rejoice over it, and are satisfied with it as it is, is the measure in which we have lost our vision of the City of God, and personal fellowship with the God of the city.

Out of our supreme content and rest in God and in His will, arises the restlessness of perpetual protest against everything that is unlike God. That is the driving force which will enable us to destroy the destructive, and to help in the building of the city of God. Pilgrims, warriors, builders, "We have not here an abiding city"!