**VOLUME 5; CHAPTER 21 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE KINGDOM: "OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM" by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of heaven.*

*Matthew 18:3*

OUR THEME TONIGHT IS THAT OF THE CHARACTER necessary for entrance to the Kingdom. The words of my text were not addressed to the promiscuous multitude. I do not mean by that statement to infer that they have no application for such a multitude, but to insist upon it that their first application is to disciples. That fact makes them all the more significant, all the more remarkable and weighty.

In that hour came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven? And He called to Him a little child, and set Him in the midst of them, and said: Verily, I say unto you, except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of heaven.

When His disciples asked, "Who then is greatest in the Kingdom?" He forced them back to the wicket-gate, and said: "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of heaven."

There has been no revolt in the great Kingdom of God save among angels and men - at least, so far as revelation has enlightened us on the subject. When Heber, in his great missionary hymn, looking out over all the world, said "… every prospect pleases, And only man is vile," he wrote something which has often been criticized and often objected to, but which is perfectly true. Apart from the fall of angels and the fall of man - resulting from the revolt of angels who kept not their first estate, but left their proper habitation - the whole creation is unfallen.

The words of Paul, in his letter to the Romans, involuntarily suggest themselves in this connection: "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God." When by reason of rebellion man lost his sceptre, and so lost the power to govern, all nature suffered. We are quite conscious that everywhere in nature there are things out of harmony with the will of God which has been revealed to us by Christ. Suffering, sorrow, limitation are everywhere; and all for the lack of the authority of a true King. In proportion as man, individually, socially and racially, is restored to true relationship with God, the whole creation will be lifted, remade, re-established, and so will be restored the whole great Kingdom of God. The redemption of creation waits for the redemption of man. That is a large subject with which we have not time to deal now. I mention it only that we may see its relation to the theme which is to demand our attention.

Man, living in the territory of God, is in revolt against Him. That sentence is very easily uttered. I would to God that conviction of its meaning might come to all of us. Man, living within the area of the Kingdom, and in the territory of God, is yet in revolt. The emphasis I now desire is not upon the last part of that statement, but upon the first part. Every man is living in the Kingdom of God in some sense. There is no power of my life that is not a God-created power. I said power; I did not say paralysis. There is paralysis in my life which is not of God; but the power which is paralyzed is of God. Whatever there is essential to my manhood is God's creation. This is God's world. I am weary of the men and women who speak of it as the devil's world. It is God's world. In God's great Kingdom men are dwelling, and yet are in revolt, breaking His law.

The inquiry of this meditation is as to how a man may get back into the Kingdom. Now this may seem to contradict my assertion that all men are in the Kingdom. Let us, therefore, be very careful, Every man is in the Kingdom; yet men are in rebellion against the King. No man can escape the government of God, but he may fight against it. Hell itself is not beyond the reach of God. No man can utterly, finally, absolutely escape from God. It is impossible! It is possible, though a dire thought, that a man may live and move and have his being in God, and yet be out of harmony with Him, in revolt against Him. That man must still feel the touch of His power, but it will blast instead of bless. My own experience of God is created by my attitude toward God. God is eternal, unchangeable love. If I yield to the wooing of His love, I know its sweet and tender embrace; but if I am rebellious and set myself against the purposes of that love, by that very attitude of mine I find that God is a consuming fire. These are not two things, but the two aspects of one fact; the difference is always the result of the difference in the attitudes of men toward God. That fact runs through the Bible from the story of Eden and the flaming sword, to the last chapter in the visions of the Seer of Patmos. Out of the stately, wonderful movement of revelation in this matter let me quote an illustration, not very familiar, yet known I have no doubt. Malachi spoke of the day toward which men were looking. Notice his description: "Behold, the day cometh, it burneth as a furnace; and all the proud and all that work wickedness shall be stubble"; and he continued: "But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." These are not two days, but one. The sunrise burns as an oven things that lack root and life, and heals and helps the things that are planted by the rivers of water. God is unchangeable. Man's relation to Him determines man's experience of Him.

How, then, may a man enter His Kingdom? How can he get back to Him consciously, to find the Kingdom; not the Kingdom of scorching, burning, destroying fire, but the Kingdom of breadth, beauty, and beneficence - of light, and life, and love, and liberty?

Taking the affirmation of my text away from its context for a moment - returning to that by way of application - we hear the great King Himself answering our inquiry: "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of heaven." Now our danger is that we seek to read into this story and into these words certain generally accepted theological ideas. Would to God we could get back to the simple naturalness of the thing that Jesus said and did. Let us endeavor so to do. The matter of first importance is that we keep before us the picture of Jesus with His disciples round Him. They had come with an inquiry. He took a boy - our translation says a child, but the pronoun is masculine - I do not know who the boy was; in all probability he was playing near at hand, or standing on the edge of the crowd which had gathered around the Lord. He laid His hand on the boy, and put him in the midst of His disciples. Do not be angry with me when I say I do not think he was a Sunday-school boy. By that I mean, he was not a boy prepared for the occasion. He had not passed through the class and learned his catechism in order to be put in the midst. He was a boy at play, a boy of the common crowd, a boy not specifically and purposely prepared and brought there. He took such a boy, and put him in the midst, and said, "You ask Me who is the greatest in the Kingdom. I want you to know and remember, that unless you become like that boy you cannot enter into the Kingdom." That is to say, Jesus declared that forevermore the child character is the character of such as enter into the Kingdom. I am not yet dealing with the question of how a man can be restored to childhood. I am simply insisting upon the teaching of Jesus Christ as to the necessity for such restoration. To enter the Kingdom a man must have the character of a little child.

I wish I could startle you with that. Notwithstanding the fact that centuries have gone, we have hardly begun to understand it. Gradually, slowly, very slowly, the Church of God is putting the child where it ought to be put - in the midst - and is making the child the type and pattern of character in the great Kingdom of God. If we wanted to show a man what he must be like to enter into the Kingdom of God, we should in all probability take down from our library shelves the life of some mystic saint, and say, "That is the type of character in the Kingdom of God." Christ did not say so. He said something much more revolutionary, much more startling. He took a child, and put him in the midst of the quarreling, wrangling, office-seeking disciples, and said, "You cannot enter into the Kingdom until you are like that child."

Now let us diligently endeavor to discover what this really means. What is this character that Jesus declared to be necessary in order to enter His Kingdom? To tell all the facts would be difficult, for simplicity is ever most sublime. The only people who can tell you all about children are the people who never had any. They deliver most of the lectures to mothers. Is there a child in your home? Put that child in your midst tonight; your boy - if he is mischievous, all the better - put him in your midst. That child, in his artlessness and simplicity, is the sublimest revelation possible of the character that Christ demands and that God asks.

Look at the simplest things about this little child. There is its perfect naturalness; secondly, its impressionableness; thirdly, its .natural confidence; and, finally, its imperfection. Take all the life of a child, physical life, mental life, and spiritual life, and all these things are true of it. I have not exhausted the subject; these are only suggestive things that are true of the life and character of every child.

First its naturalness. The child answers the impulses of its own possibility. The child is curious, and it will ask questions. It is not until it gets older that it wears the veneer of a false restraint. The child will manifest, if you watch it, all the facts of its own being. If a child loves you, it will tell you so and fling its arms about you. It is only when you get older that your respectability cools off the ardour with which you dare to declare your love. In the child there is perfect naturalness. This is a very searching word, if we will let it search us. You say, "My boy is not natural." Then mourn over your sin, because you are that boy's father. The life of the child naturally is perfectly natural; it is life that does not dissemble, life devoid of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is acting a part. There is no hypocrisy in a child.

The child is impressionable, amenable to training, plastic to moulding, and receptive. I remember the statement of a Roman Catholic bishop: "Give me your child until he is seven, and I care not who has him afterwards. I will have made an impression upon him that can never be effaced." I know something of the controversy as to whether heredity or environment be the stronger force in the life of a child. Personally, I have no hesitation in saying that I consider environment is far stronger than heredity. If you begin soon enough, you can mould any child. There are men here who are Christian, because the hand of godly father or mother was placed upon their character early enough, in order to mould it in that direction. If there be no other man, I am that man. I am a Christian tonight because from the earliest years of my recollection the hands of godly parents were placed upon me. The child is naturally plastic, impressionable, confident, trustful. I know about the boys in the slums of London who are cunning and artful; but what has made them so? The devilish system in the midst of which they were born. Think of that great institution, to which my mind always goes when I think of neglected children, the homes connected with the name of Dr. Barnardo; if they can get a boy early enough, though he has never had the influence of father and mother to help him, the child still has the capacity for faith and confidence.

The child is imperfect. That is not a sin. When I say imperfect, I will illustrate what I mean entirely in the physical realm. A child lying in its mother's arm is not perfect. Of course, you must not tell the mother so. That little aside helps me to draw the distinction between what I do mean and what I do not mean. It is absolutely perfect, but it is not perfected. If it be healthy, it is perfect; yet the perfection that you admire is the potentiality of a grander perfection that lies ahead. There is room for development, growth.

Now, said Jesus to His disciples, "Except ye turn, and become as little children." The character that He demands for entrance to His Kingdom is that of perfect naturalness, that which is impressionable, the character which has in it the elements of trust and confidence, the character which is not yet perfected. Thank God He does not demand absolute and final perfection; but He does demand the perfection of naturalness, impressionability, and confidence; all the things that make it possible for him to command and guide and develop, and ultimately to crown and glorify.

Now, in order that we may return to that with still greater force, let us go one step further. If that be the character demanded, looked at so far as we are able to do so in all simplicity, listen to the condition He imposes upon men: "Except ye turn, and become as little children." In that condition there are two things we need to notice. First, that it suggests the necessity for change; and, secondly, that the suggestion of turning reveals the fact that the nature of the change necessary is going back to first principles, to first ideals, to the simplicity of beginnings.

May I attempt to illustrate by passing over the notes, to which I asked your attention, when considering character? Turn to naturalness, from that which is its opposite, hypocrisy. Turn to absolute truth and simplicity, from the life that attempts to keep up appearances; turn to willingness to appear what you really are. Do you mean to suggest, someone inquires, that men are all hypocrites? I do; and I not only suggest it, but I affirm it. The one outstanding difficulty in the way of men coming into the Kingdom of God is that of hypocrisy. Take the story of the ministry of Jesus as you have it in the New Testament. What do you find? He never said a harsh word to a sinner - that is, such as we would call a sinner, the woman taken in adultery, for instance - but scorn, satire, anger, were always manifest when He dealt with hypocrites. Why? Because hypocrisy hinders a man more than anything else. This audience is in perfect agreement so far. You agree with this whole attitude of Jesus up to a certain point. You know the man who masquerades as religious and lacks religion - how you denounce him; the man who professes to be in the world what he is not - how you despise him. Hypocrisy has fine shades, and there are subtle degrees of it. Here is a man who makes no profession of goodness, yet all the while, in the deepest of him, his heart is crying out after God. That is hypocrisy. There are scores of people listening to preaching who are moved by the messages they hear, who, nevertheless, go back to a godless life. Why? Because for years they have taken up a certain position, and if they confessed that they needed a Saviour and yielded to Him, it would give the lie to the position they have occupied for so long. There are hundreds of church members who need to be born again. Their difficulty lies in the fact that they are church members, that they are hypocrites, that they are naming a name that they do not hallow, praying for the coming of a Kingdom whose coming they hinder, asking for the will of God to be done while they do not permit it to be done in their own lives. From all hypocrisy men must turn and become as children, in simple, artless naturalness, ere they can enter the Kingdom.

Not only from hypocrisy to naturalness, but from hardness to impressionableness. Hardness; the fear of tears; the foolhardy love of false consistency; the rendering of the heart adamant against all appeal and argument. There are those who have so steeled themselves against the message, have so hardened their hearts in the presence of the declarations of truth, that they have become hard. They must turn and become children again; must get back to softness, simplicity, willingness to learn.

Once more; back from rebellion to confidence, from cynicism to trust. With the passing of the years, many have lost faith in God and in man. They are guided in all the doing of their life by doubt. They do business upon the assumption that every man is a rogue until they have proved him honest. They doubt their neighbour, every man; they doubt God; they have become cynical. Back, says Christ, to the capacity for belief in something, someone; back to childhood. You laugh at your childhood; you say you have escaped the softness of childhood, the dreamings of youth. That is the tragedy. You have shed no tears for years. There was a time in your childhood when you shed tears, when one morning you found your pet canary dead in its cage. You have not cried recently, though you have left a track of ruined men and women behind you. Back to childhood. In the name of God, this is not a soft word. It is a veritable fire. It scorches me now as I preach. I become tremendously conscious as I stand before you of how little I know of the child heart and spirit.

This King, so sweet, so gentle, so loving, stands at the wicket; and as I would argue about greatness and position and fame in the Kingdom, He says, "Back, you cannot enter until you get back into childhood." This word of command is an awful word; a word that fills my soul with fear; a word that wrings from me this inquiry, "How can I ever find my way back to childhood?" To this inquiry let us hear the answer. On a housetop in Jerusalem this same King once sat with one man. The man had come to Him, a man of culture and refinement and influence, a man that Jesus could trust because of his honesty and lack of hypocrisy. Sitting together there, as Canon Liddon once suggested, perchance they heard the sighing and moaning of the wind in the streets of Jerusalem. To that inquiring, honest heart the Christ said this strange and mystic thing - He said it to no other man, it was too profound and too wonderful to be commonly spoken - but He said it to this man: "Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

Let us put these two things together. "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of heaven"; "Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." The human responsibility is revealed in the word "turn." The Divine activity is indicated in the phrase "born anew," born from above. If the King stands at the wicket-gate with a flaming, fiery sword, keeping back the hypocrite, the hardened man, the cynic, in His hand is the gift of life for that very hardened man, that very cynic, that very unbeliever. Thou mayest be born again - that is, thou mayest become a child. This King will lead thee back to the beginning of things. If thou wilt but turn back toward His ideal, He will turn to thee with dynamic suddenness, and the thing thou desirest shall be thine.

"Except ye turn, and become as little children " I can turn back in strong desire; I can turn back in solemn dedication; I can turn back in obedience; but I shall never become a child again until He touch me Himself, touch me with new life; then, wonder of wonders, He takes away by His transforming touch the heart of stone, and gives me a heart of flesh. Tears spring again, and tenderness permeates all my astonished life. I am willing to be taught and willing to be led; I put the crown upon His brow, and the Kingdom is within me because I have become a child by my repentance, and by the renewing touch of His life upon mine.

When can that be? Now. That Kingdom cometh, in this sense also, not by observation. It will come into observation presently, but it cometh not by observation. That Kingdom comes to the man who comes to the Kingdom. In the moment in which I turn back, and yield myself to His great demand, in that moment by the touch of His life He gives me back my childhood. There are very many songs sung today which are full of nonsense; but there are some wonderful songs. There is an old one comes to my mind now; some of you have sung it, perhaps idly:

Backward, turn backward, O time, in your flight;

Make me a child again, just for tonight;

Mother, come back from the echoless shore,

Take me again to your heart as of yore;

Kiss from my forehead the furrows of care,

Smooth the silver threads out of my hair,

Over my slumbers your loving watch keep,

Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

This is not a cry for toys. It is the wail of a weary soul for home, for rest, for God. Is there anything more pathetic in literature and poetry than Tom Hood's song?

I remember, I remember,

The house where I was born,

The little window where the sun

Came peeping in at morn;

He never came a wink too soon,

Nor brought too long a day,

But now I often wish the night

Had borne my breath away,

I remember, I remember,

The fir trees dark and high;

I used to think their slender tops

Were close against the sky.

It was a childish ignorance,

But now 'tis little joy

To know I'm farther off from heaven

Than when I was a boy.

Is not that what you are saying in your heart tonight? If so, the King confronts you, and says to you, "Except you come back and become a child, you cannot enter into the Kingdome"

I will take for granted your interest, and that you are saying with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" The answer of Christ to you is this: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is everyone that is born of the Spirit." At this moment we are in the midst of everything that is necessary for our remaking. Whether in the church or outside of it, this is the day of Pentecost. Do not talk of Pentecost as though it were a day nineteen centuries ago. Westminster Chapel is as full of the Spirit as was the upper room on that Day of Pentecost. We are in the midst of the river of life. What, then, shall we do? Turn back to the King, yielding to all that He desires and appoints; then He will give to us new hearts and new life - the child nature.

The King said another thing one day, which sounds contradictory, but is not so, "The Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force." That does not sound like getting back to childhood. Yet it is true that before some of us get back to childhood, we become violent men and women. In what sense? Another word of the King will help us: "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off; if thy right eye makes thee to stumble, pluck it out." So get back to childhood. I dare not, will not be untrue to the word of the Master, and end as though this were a lullaby. There is a lullaby beyond it. There is the mother-heart, the father-heart beyond it. Infinite peace and spaciousness are beyond it. The moment a man enters into that life, he finds all renewal. All restoration is beyond. But if we would be in this Kingdom, we must get back to childhood, however fierce the struggle be. May God help us to make that struggle for His name's sake.