**VOLUME 6; CHAPTER 16 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**LIFE THROUGH DEATH by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*I am the good Shepherd; the good Shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep.*

*John 10:11*

IN THIS PARTICULAR STATEMENT OF THE TEXT AND IN THE whole of the passage surrounding it we have an illuminative statement of Christ with regard to His death and its relation to our life. He affirmed that He is the Good Shepherd, and quoted as supreme qualification for the fulfilment of the function of the Shepherd the fact that He laid down His life for the sheep.

It is very important that we should clearly understand that this declaration means infinitely more than that He died for the sheep. When Jesus said in the words of my text, "I lay down My life for the sheep," He did mean that He would die, but He meant more. He meant to say, "I lay down My life for the sheep" that they may have the life I lay down. "I have come," He said, "that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly?" What life is it that He had come that we might have? His own life, as His words, "I lay down My life for the sheep," make plain. So that the great statement of my text includes the fact of His death, and that profounder fact, that by the way of His death His life is at the disposal of men.

I ask you, then - and may God help us all to approach such a subject reverently - to consider the death of Christ in relation to the impartation of life to believing souls.

We all know in art the importance of background to any picture. I shall take a little time to put in the background of my theme by considering the death of Christ in relation to Himself alone, and this in order that I may proceed to put in the foreground of the picture the death of Christ in its relation to sinful and sinning men.

With regard to this subject of background, let me ask you to think with me carefully of that death of Christ in relation to His life, and apart from its great connection with our salvation. It is a somewhat difficult thing to do, I grant you. We have become so familiar with the story of His death as related to His mission and to our salvation. We have so constantly and almost unconsciously - and thank God that it is so - thought of that death as being intimately related with our profoundest need. But shall we attempt for a moment to look at that death simply in its relation to His life?

Let me say at once, in order that I may arrest your attention and aid you in following me along this line, that if the death of Christ stand alone in relation to the life of Christ, and be not seen to have immediate connection with the sin of man, then the death of Christ will make me an infidel immediately. That is a superlative statement, I desired that it should be so, for by such superlative sentences I am attempting to put in this dark background.

There is no problem so terrible and so impossible of solution in all the realm of evil and all the fact of pain as the death of Christ, until we catch its profounder meaning and accept the great evangel concerning it, which He declares.

The death of Christ creates the greatest moral mystery that the mind of man can ever attempt to solve. The death of Christ at the age of thirty-three or thereabouts was the eclipse of light, the extinction of love, the ending of the one life that is by all men - whatever their views of the Person of Christ may be - conceded to be the perfect Pattern and highest Ideal of human life that the world has ever seen.

I say, first of all, that the death of Christ was the eclipse of light. Form what opinion you will of His Person, the fact remains that "never man spake like this Man." My brethren, I pause because a sentence like that lures a man on to exposition and defense of it. I repeat it. "Never man spake like this Man." No other teacher that the world has ever had has pressed into so few and brief sentences so much wisdom which has been productive of such tremendous result in the history of the race as the teaching of Jesus.

The teaching of Jesus was clear, authoritative, rational. He never speculated. There was nothing hesitating about the teaching of Jesus. He said things that had any other man said the world would have ceased to listen to him long ago on account of pride and arrogance. And yet men listen to Him. One illustration will suffice me at this point. There was a day when, standing in the midst of the crowds, He said this: "I do always the things that are pleasing to God," Can you find me another teacher who dare say such a thing and be believed? If I came and faced my congregation on some Sabbath and said to them, I always please God - when the newspapers, religious or irreligious, noticed it, they would say, "From that moment people ceased to believe in him. And quite right that they should. But I find in my Gospel of John this fact: after He had said, "I do always the things that are pleasing to God," from that time "many believed on Him." That is the marvelous mystery of Jesus Christ, His teaching was clear and authoritative and rational and final, and He said such things concerning God, and the soul, and eternity as man had never said and never thought, but which the human conscience knew at once to be true. And He had not said half men wanted Him to say when He was arrested, condemned by the most iniquitous mock trial that ever disgraced the pages of human history, and murdered in cold blood. The Light was eclipsed. Men were groping after it. The world had had other teachers, and the most honest and remarkable of them had said they could not speak of certain subjects with authority. Both Socrates and Plato, among the Greek philosophers, announced that they could teach men only to ask questions concerning God, the soul, and destiny; that another teacher must come who could answer these questions. And He came and answered the questions concerning God, and the soul, and destiny; and yet before His teaching seemed to be well nigh begun He was put to death.

But I go further, and say that in the death of Jesus I see the extinction of love. Among all the love stories that have charmed the hearts of men there never was such a love story as the story of Jesus, and every man knows it if he will stop and think. Jesus' love was a love absolutely and utterly self-forgetful. His was a love equal to intense severity and devoid of fear. His was a love patient enough to discover good where no one else could discover it, and to wait for its development. His was a love strong enough to denounce wrong in the heart and life of His best beloved. His was a love strong enough to look Peter in the face, and say to him, "Get thee behind me, Satan." I know you better than you know yourself. You have the making of the common blasphemer in you, Peter. His love was strong enough to say to that same man: You will deny Me, but trust Me, and I will realize the good. "Let not your heart be troubled."

His was a love that flamed out strongest in death. I am not now referring to the essential values of the death, but to the simple human story. Oh, man and woman, Christian or un-Christian, did you ever hear such language, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"? Yet a Man Whose life was all love was arrested at thirty-three years of age, and murdered, and God did not interfere.

Or take one other point. The death of Jesus was the ending of the one life that was a perfect pattern according to our human ideals. His was the one life which revealed the meaning of life eternal, in which the intellect was illumined by the spiritual, the emotion impulsed by the eternal, and the will dominated by Deity. Yet that perfect life was permitted by God to be arrested and ended in bloody brutality.

In the presence of the death of Christ I find myself confronted by the most superlative manifestation of the problem of evil that the world has ever seen. And I ask this question, and I do not hesitate to ask it: Is the moral Governor of the universe good? There is nothing in that death to show it, until you have the evangelical explanation of it. These are the questions we ask in the presence of the Cross, if we think at all. There is nothing else that compares with this. A life, perfect in light, perfect in love, perfect in essential life, and yet priests in malicious hatred inspired the brutal government of the Roman power to lay foul hands on the fair life and murder it. Where is God? When I stand in the presence of the Cross, I ask, Is God good, and is He powerful? These are the questions that come to me.

Now let me again put this thing superlatively. It is on my heart as a burden. Unless what the New Testament teaches about the death of Christ be true, that there was more value in it than ever can be associated with the moral personality of Jesus, that there was some infinite mystery lying behind that death that awaited the revelation of God, then that Cross makes me an unbeliever. That is all background, dark and mysterious background. I have emphasized it only that we may now turn to the great foreground of revelation.

Christ has answered our problem. I ask you simply to listen to this one word of Jesus about His own dying. The first factor contributing to the solution of the problem is the fact that Christ knew of His death, and distinctly foretold it, and went quietly and resolutely toward it, knowing its manner and method before He came to it. That helps me to a solution, though not to the final one. In the unclouded intelligence of eternal life He foretold His dying. In the over-whelming love of eternal life He chose that method of dying. In the overcoming power of eternal life He accomplished His dying.

I say, in the first place, that in the unclouded intelligence of eternal life He foretold His dying. All through the Gospel story this is evident. I recommend to young men and women interested in this to obtain a book, the most luminous and valuable I have ever read on the New Testament teaching on this subject. I refer to Dr. Denney's Death of Christ, more valuable as a treatise on the Atonement than anything I have ever read, because in that book Dr. Denney does not attempt any philosophic account, but simply interprets the New Testament teaching. Among other things that Christ taught about His death, I find this word at the beginning of His public ministry. I see Him engaged in one of those first activities when He cleansed the temple, and men came to him and said, "What sign showest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things? " and He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The men who listened to Him did not understand Him. The materialists round about Him did not understand Him. They laughed at Him. They thought He spoke of the material temple; but the inspired exposition goes on, "He spake of the temple of His body." So that, in effect, when men said to Him at the beginning, What is your authority? He said, The authority of My death and resurrection. That was the final thing. Not the ethical teaching, not the social order, but the dying and resurrection.

Or, if we go on a little further into the public ministry, we find Him sitting one night, not among the crowds, but with a lonely inquirer on the housetop. It was a great mystery to Nicodemus, that necessity for new birth; and he asked Jesus two questions. First, "How can a man …?" That is the question of critical unbelief. Then, "How can these things be?" That was the question of inquiring honesty. And when he asked Him the second question, How can a man have this life, or by what process is it communicated to him, Jesus said to him, "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." In effect, Jesus Christ said to the inquiring soul who asked the way of life, The only way of life is by My death. Through that, the new life of which I speak will be placed at the disposal of men.

So that whether He cleansed the temple, or talked to an inquiring soul, underneath His act and His teaching, His right, His authority in His own consciousness, was the right, the authority of that very Cross which fills us with the sense of problem, and almost of pain.

Then, again, not only did He foretell it, but in the over-whelming love of His life He chose it. How often it was suggested to Him that He should omit the Cross from His program. I think, perhaps, the suggestion came first at the beginning of public ministry in the wilderness, when the devil, making to pass before Him in splendid array the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, said to Him, "All these will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me." It was subtle, insidious - yes, I must use the word - devilish. What did he mean? Here is a short cut to these kingdoms. Thou hast come for them, and according to all the foreshadowing of the past, and the purpose of Thy heart, Thou art going to death. For remember, Jesus, being baptized in Jordan's waters, typified His consent to die with the transgressors. Take this short and easy method, One moment's homage, and I will give Thee all the kingdoms. Christ turned His back on that short and easy method, choosing the Cross, God's way of suffering and dying, in order to gain possession of the kingdoms.

Again the temptation came when He turned from the ministry to the nation and began that to His own disciples, and Peter said to Him, "That be far from Thee, Lord," pity Thyself, Jesus in stern words said to him, "Get thee behind Me, Satan ... thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men." The things of men are the things that save life from pain, the things of pure selfishness, that make men choose the easy path. The things of God for the salvation of men demand the Cross, and suffering, and pain; and thus He turned His back again upon the suggestion that He should miss the Cross.

In the gospel according to John it is recorded that certain Greeks wanted to see Him, and when His disciples came running and said, Master, some Greeks are here, and want to see Thee, He said the very strangest thing in all the world, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit. ... If any man serve Me, let him follow Me."

What was His meaning? Most evidently this: The Greeks desire to see Me. They cannot see Me. No man can see Me now. They must wait for My dying and its issue to see Me. The way of the Cross is the only way by which a man can see Me. Thus He anticipated and deliberately chose the Cross. And we have but to read His prayer to see how the Cross burdened Him, overshadowed Him. He said, "Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour. But for this cause came I unto this hour" - and He did not say, Father, save Me from this hour, but "Father, glorify Thy name." The supreme passion of His life was not to be saved from anything, but that God's name should be glorified. And the answer came, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." And then the word of Jesus rang out about His Cross: "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself." He deliberately chose the Cross, as well as foretold it.

And once again, in the overcoming power of that eternal life; the Cross which He knew and chose, He accomplished. Those were the very remarkable words that Jesus spoke in connection with the declaration of our text: "Therefore doth the Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Have we not been a little inclined to say that Jesus died because men murdered Him? There are some senses in which that is correct. But here is the profounder truth. Jesus said, "No one taketh it (My life) away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself." Did you say that is poetic, a mere figure of speech? But listen, He said something else. "I … take it again." Now, if He took it again I will believe that He laid it down, and no man took it from Him. Did He take it again? Yes, thank God for the answer. If somebody says no, then you will question the authority of the statement that He laid it down. In secondary senses - in the sense in which man was an instrument of a Divine purpose - men took His life away; but in the underlying profundities, God gave Him commandment, authority to lay down His life Himself, and He did what none other has ever done, He laid it down and took it again. To me death is a fact, but to Him it was an act. He is lonely and sublime and majestic in the mystery of His dying, and I see Him laying down His life through the secondary process of human murder, but in the underlying fundamental authority of a Divine counsel. And that, my brethren, is what Peter meant when preaching on the Day of Pentecost, he said of Jesus, "Him … by the hands of lawless men did crucify and slay." But Peter also said He was "delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." So that I see in this dying that appalls me, this great Cross that shocks me, first, that Jesus knew and foretold it; second, that He went toward it, choosing it; and third, that He died of His own will, and authority, and power. And in that death of Christ, which He - to use the word used in connection with the Holy Mount - accomplished, I have at last touched some secret spring of life. This death is not the ordinary death of other men. It is different, removed, supreme, and marvelous beyond all dying. So that the dying of Christ at the end of His life has in it qualities, quantities, virtues, values, that can be in no other dying.

And now let us go a little further. What did Christ say concerning His death? I confine myself now to the simple statement of this text. He said, "I am the Good Shepherd." The Good Shepherd and the wolf are favorite figures of Jesus. If you go back to Matthew, you will read that He saw the multitudes of the cities and villages and was moved with compassion because they were as sheep scattered, having no shepherd. And that word "scattered" means flung to the ground, torn and mangled by wolves - harassed. The wolf is the one that destroys the sheep. The Good Shepherd is the One Who loves the sheep, and Who will enter into conflict with the wolf that destroys the sheep. How will He do it? The Good Shepherd laid down His life when He took hold on sin and entered into mortal and final conflict with it. There was only one way to overcome it, and that was by dying. The Good Shepherd did not hesitate at dying, in order that by His dying He might make dead the thing that spoiled the sheep. The Good Shepherd entered into conflict with the wolf, and therein laid down His life for the sheep.

Let us go still further. The Good Shepherd laid down His life for the sheep. There is a greater truth contained in this than the figure that Jesus used here can possibly contain. Here is a supreme truth that submerges the figure. No truth of God can finally and fully be contained in figures, even those which Jesus used. This is not to question Jesus, but it is to say that figures always faint and fail before infinite facts; and whatever figure Jesus used, you find it was full and overflowing.

I take the figure of the Eastern shepherd. I see Him going into conflict with the wolf. I see Him die as the wolf dies, that the sheep may be delivered and die no more. But here the figure fails. Jesus said, "l take it again," and I take it again for the sheep. Now, suppose the Eastern shepherd dying slew the wolf, and then, taking hold of his own life again, gave it to the sheep, so that the sheep that were not strong enough to enter into conflict and have victory over the wolf should take the very nature of the shepherd and become able to enter into conflict and overcome. That is the figure of the dying of Jesus and the liberation of His life. He died for the destruction of the destroyer, but He rose again, and in His rising He took back His life, not to hold it, but to give it; not to possess it, but to pass it on to others. And today I believe in Him, and have His very life, so that I, who could not have victory over the wolf in my own strength, but in His strength, have received the very nature that triumphs over the wolf; and I am made master of the things that mastered me by the thrill and the throb of the very life of the Shepherd Who died and rose again.

"I am the Good Shepherd, the Good Shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep." And out of this comes the great evangel. The wolf which snatcheth and scattereth is overcome. The Shepherd life which overcame him is communicated, and in its power I also may overcome. Eternal life is now at the disposal of men who put their trust in Jesus; and in that gift there are two values, the value of the death for the putting away of sin, and the value of the life, that men may go and sin no more. The Good Shepherd giveth His life to the sheep.

The contemplation of the life eternal in Jesus is the most overwhelming and disheartening exercise possible to man, and if I have nothing in Christ other than the revelation of what eternal life means, that revelation serves only to reveal my degradation. Unless in some way the life revealed can be communicated to me, unless, somehow, the great ethical beauty manifested can become the dynamic virtue operating in me, then the revelation does nothing for me. No man has ever yet been lifted out of degradation by the contemplation of an ideal. No man has ever yet been saved - and I use the word of set purpose - by looking at the glory of Jesus Christ.

Think of it a little more carefully with me. You tell me of the light of His intelligence operating in the realm of eternal love, and I tell you that the light blinds me. You tell me of the love that impulsed all His doing, and I tell you that the love makes me ashamed of my lovelessness and utter selfishness. You tell me that the exercise of His will was sufficient to resist all temptation, and I am amazed, but I am not helped. I am not helped by looking at the light, or hearing of the love, or watching the great life principle, because it is all outside me. In my ignorance I stand in the presence of the light, and in my darkness I stand in the presence of the love, and in my base unworthiness I stand in the presence of the life that operates to perfect volition; and I say with the Apostle, "To me who would do good, evil is present." There is a paralysis in my veins and blood, and though I admire the ideal, I cannot translate it into the real. Such light reveals darkness. Such love makes one blush for very shame. Such strength of will makes me afraid; and by all this I mean that the incarnation alone never did, and never can, save a single soul.

What, then, must be done? That life must be given up in and through death. Had there been no sin to atone for, perchance there might have been the communication of a life that should have made me undying without the death of the Cross. But because sin is there, the death of the Cross must be the harvest of sin; and in that lone and awful moment, when in His dying He cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He spoke the words that I ought to speak. Then He was at the utmost issue of sin. Then He was in the deepest depth of sorrow. Then He touched the unfathomable and unutterable mystery of silence. He was God-forsaken.

I see the crowd in Pilate's hall,

I mark their wrathful mien,

Their shouts of "Crucify" appall

With blasphemy between.

But of that shouting multitude

I know that I am one.

Ask me the meaning of this death, and I stand in the presence of it intellectually, and assert that it is a mystery. But, ah, me, when there lies before me His thought of it, His estimate of it, His declared purpose in it, then I bow my head in the presence of the Cross and say, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me"; and out of the mystery of that dying, that substitutionary, vicarious, atoning dying - and if you take those words from me you make me an infidel at once - there comes to me the great gift of life.

And now in the communicated life of Christ, liberated through the mystery of His death, I see, for the intelligence is illumined; I love, for the emotion is enkindled; I obey and serve, for the will is brought under its proper impulse and motive. And all this in the eternal sense. The present becomes part of the future, and death becomes the gate of life, because the Good Shepherd gave His life for the sheep.

Have we that life? It is at our disposal. He tasted death for every man, and unless we have it, then we have no intelligence that takes in the infinite, no love that fastens on God and man and fulfils all the law, no power equal to the obedience that blossoms into righteousness. And if we have not the life, let us take it. It is God's gift to us. "He that believeth on the Son hath life, eternal life."