**VOLUME 6; CHAPTER 19 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE SECRETS OF REST by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.*

*Psalm 37:7*

WHATEVER PLACE MENDELSSOHN REALLY OCCUPIES IN THE firmament of composers, it is certain that no single number of the great oratorios has made profounder or more lasting appeal to the heart of humanity than the poised and perfect air, "O rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." This is due, not only to the perfection of the music, but to the fact that Mendelssohn understood the theme.

The place of the writing of the air in his own life is full of interest, although not now to be dealt with at any length. Those of you who are familiar with the story of his life, a wonderful life of only eight and thirty years, will remember that it was in 1838, when he was twenty-seven years of age, that the subject of Elijah was suggested to him for an oratorio, and that it gradually took shape through years of stress and strain. You will also remember that in 1846 it was produced in Birmingham, and that he went back home again, broken in health, to die in a little more than a year. There can be little doubt that when the music of Elijah was written by Mendelssohn he was himself passing through stress and strain, yet living in the secret place of the Most High, knowing what it was indeed to "rest in the Lord."

Those of you most familiar with that oratorio will know the place this air occupies therein. It is in the second part. We have listened to the angry clamor of Jezebel in that strange hour when it seemed as though unrighteousness must inevitably triumph again over righteousness in Israel, in spite of the victory on Carmel. We have seen the prophet descending from the altitude of his triumph to the lowliness of the juniper tree. Under the juniper tree we have seen the angels come and minister to him. Mendelssohn, in his arrangement of the oratorio, has gathered some of the strains of the perpetual music which had comforted the heart of man, and has treated them as though the angel sang them to Elijah. Among the rest are the words of our text, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." That placing of the air in the great oratorio is in perfect harmony with the spirit of the psalm, the introductory part of which we read as lesson. It opens in an atmosphere electric with trouble:

Fret not thyself because of evil-doers,

Neither be thou envious against them that work unrighteousness,

and moves in its earliest verses through stages of experience until at last the ultimate note is reached in my text,

Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him

Let me attempt this morning to lead you first in meditation on the attitude described: "Rest in the Lord," interpreted by "wait patiently for Him." In the second place, let us inquire quite honestly, Is this possible? Finally, and briefly, let us attempt some personal application.

First, then, the attitude described in this passage: "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." I have already reminded you of that to which I now return for a moment. The text occurs in the first seven verses of the Thirty-seventh Psalm. The rest of the psalm is but exposition, explanation, application of the theme of these verses. All its fundamental verities are in these seven verses. Will you note the boundaries of them: the first phrase is,

Fret not thyself because of evil-doers.

The last word is,

Fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way,

Because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.

It is immediately evident that this opening movement in the great psalm is in the nature of a protest against panic. Whether the Psalmist was speaking to his own soul, or was writing to comfort and help a comrade, we cannot tell; the fact of importance is that behind the psalm we become conscious of strange conflict; it was composed in an atmosphere perplexing to the man of faith; in the background we see evil-doers, men who work unrighteousness, and we see these men prospering in their way, bringing their wicked devices to pass. Wickedness is triumphant. That is the picture in the background. The psalm is addressed to a troubled soul, troubled by this vision of the apparent victory of evil, and I repeat that these opening and closing words, so far as the introductory movement is concerned, are those of protest against panic, "Fret not thyself," literally, Make not thy heart hot in the presence of the apparent victory of iniquity. Between that opening word, "Fret not," and that final word, "Fret not," we find an ascending scale: "Trust in the Lord … Delight thyself in the Lord. ... Commit thy way unto the Lord. … Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." Rest, that is the eighth note in the octave. The fundamental note, and the first, is trust. Trust, delight, commit, rest, and wait patiently! As I was preparing my sermon I wished that I could take this congregation and divide it into sections, and make them sing the notes. I would like those occupying the section on my left hand to sing on one note, "Trust in the Lord." I would like those sitting in the central section to sing on another note, "Delight in the Lord." Then I would like those sitting on my right hand to sing, "Commit thy way unto the Lord." Finally, I would like those in the gallery to sing on yet another note, "Rest in the Lord." Then we would have a fine harmony, a perfect chord, the fundamental note, "Trust in the Lord," and the eighth note completing the music, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." All around, the victory of iniquity, the clash of arms, the sound of war, the triumph of unrighteousness, and in the midst of it the music, "Trust …delight … commit … rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." Such is the musical motive, theme, method of the great psalm.

For a brief moment longer let me detain you on one matter to which I have already twice referred. The theme of the psalm was that of the energy and prosperity of evil men, causing perplexity and fretfulness to the man of faith. That is the situation. The men of faith, men who have endured on many a hard-fought field as seeing Him Who is invisible, men who have made great ventures on the basis of their conviction that the spiritual is true, men who have made sacrifices in the interests of the ultimate conquest of the world in righteousness for God, are conscious that things do not seem to be going that way; the drift is against righteousness: Jezebel, in spite of the victory, on Carmel. That is the background. War in spite of arbitration. New rebellions everywhere in spite of revival of spiritual interest. How is it that iniquity prospers? What is the meaning of the fact that these evil men are bringing their wicked devices to pass? The heart is hot, restless. Panic seizes the soul. To that condition the psalm appeals: "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers"; and the ultimate word is, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him."

What is this word "rest"? You notice in the margin of the Revised Version a suggested alternative reading: "Be still before the Lord," or even more directly and literally, "Be silent to Jehovah." The word "rest" is one which literally means dumbness: be dumb, be silent, be quiet. You recognize immediately that this is not fatalism, but faith. If I take out of my text the phrases "in the Lord" and "in Him," it has no meaning and no value. If I take out those words, what have I left? "Rest … and wait patiently." That would be the uttermost word of fatalism, and absolutely impossible of realization by intelligent men. "Rest," but "in the Lord"; be dumb, be silent, but in the consciousness of Him. We are to be still in the consciousness of the fact that whatever the appearances of the hour may be, men and affairs are still within the grip of His government.

Yet, as I have pondered these words, I have come to the deliberate conclusion that the only interpretation of the opening injunction to "rest in the Lord" is to be found in the closing injunction to "wait patiently for Him." These are not two things which can be separated; rather, they constitute one great inclusive charge to rest, to be still, to be silent, to be dumb before God, and all that interpreted by that strange word, the meaning of which we are so apt to miss, "wait patiently for Him."

When, for myself, I really began carefully to ponder this great and final word in the music of the psalm, I confess I was almost startled to discover the meaning of this particular word which we translate wait patiently, for there are not two words in the Hebrew, but one. I was startled, I say, when I looked at this word carefully. Take the word as to its real meaning, and it seems entirely to contradict our popular conception of what it is to wait, and to wait patiently. The root meaning of the word is to whirl incessantly; it suggests incessant movement instead of quiet passivity. One was driven therefore from the word to its use. That it would be entirely false to the spirit of the psalm to interpret the meaning of the Psalmist by the root significance of the word is apparent, therefore we must discover the use of this Hebrew word. One found that it was occasionally used exactly as it is used in the psalm to indicate an attitude of soul in the presence of God; but it is far more often used to indicate strenuous agony, proceeding through processes, toward ultimate triumph. It is a word that has within it a sense of pain. It is a word which is persistently used for the travail which issues in birth. In the choice of the word there is a fine recognition of the fact that the hardest thing the man of faith can do is to wait. There is agony in the waiting, but it is the agony that moves toward realization. There is a pang in the waiting, but it is a birth pang. There is travail in the waiting, but it is travail that is co-operative with forces which are moving to victory. Consequently, one discovers in the use of this word, strangely startling in its root significance, that to wait patiently recognizes two things, sensitiveness of the wrong and sensitiveness to the issue.

When thinking of these things I heard outside my study window the sigh of the wind, and became conscious that autumn was upon us, and I confess that sorrow and sadness crept into my heart, sadness that dimmed the brightness of the vision. When I put down my work I took up the West- minster Gazette, and the first thing that met my eye was a little poem written over the signature of S. Gertrude Ford, I want to give you that poem. I will read it without interpretation, save to say that if you listen to the two views of autumn you will see the two viewpoints of the soul that waits, sensitiveness to the darkness and the tragedy around, but also sensitiveness to the issue, the larger fact that lies beyond.

Two Visions of Autumn

Leaves flaming and then fading; pomp of mists

That wreathe, at dusk and dawn, the mountain's brow

With pride of opals and of amethysts;

The nest bare on the bough;

The swallow on the wing; the reign of flowers

Whose beauty breathes a wail of "Ichabod,"

Chrysanthemums that crown autumnal hours,

Asters and golden-rod;

The last crops garnered and the last-ripe fruits

Gathered; a sound of sighing in the air -

A sigh, too, in the tune the robin flutes,

And Autumn everywhere!

Autumn! the sleep that brings the waking nigh;

The scattering of the seed, not sown in vain,

That needs must fall into the ground and die

If it would live again;

The building of the throne where spring shall sit,

Girt round with all her lovely pageantry;

Such death, and only such, as holds in it

The birth that is to be -

This now and Winter later; then, O then,

The violet's breath, the cuckoo's call, the fair

New life that leaps in birds and beasts and men,

And Springtime everywhere!

That is waiting patiently. And the singer sang to me out of her consciousness of autumn the profoundest interpretation of my text: to the nest that is empty on the bough there is sensitiveness to the flight of the swallow, to the moaning, sighing of the autumn winds; but there is also the rarer sensitiveness to the issue, the life wrapped in the womb of death that shall burst to life in flowers, and bring the victory that is to be.

"Fret not thyself because of evil-doers" because at the moment it seems as though the darkness were comprehending, apprehending, extinguishing the light, because it seems for the moment as though unrighteousness were winning its victory. "Fret not thyself," but rather "trust … delight … commit thy way … rest and wait patiently," keen and sensitive to the agony of the hour, but more sensitive to the springtime and the summer that are to be.

Is this possible? That depends entirely on our conception of God. What is our doctrine of God? Let me ask the question in another way, using the word with great carefulness and accuracy: What is our theology, our science of God? I want to make this affirmation: a man's conception of God creates his attitude toward the hour in which he lives. Or, to reverse the order of my statement, my attitude toward the hour in which I live is a revelation of my conception of God. Let us be careful in this matter. Our figures may imprison us, may dwarf our thinking, may blight the possibility of true spiritual conception. What is our conception of God? Is He King? What do you mean by king? A king may be a despot. Is He Shepherd? What do you mean by shepherd? What is the ultimate passion of the shepherd, the fleece and the profit from the carcass of a dead sheep? Is He a Father? Be very careful; a father may be one who gives his child an inheritance of death. By all of which I mean to say the highest, inspired figures of the Bible must be very cautiously used. We must always remember, when speaking of God, that we cannot interpret Him by the figure. We must know Him Himself, and so correct the figure to the standard of the infinite fact.

Trust in the Lord, delight in Him, commit thy way unto Him, rest in Him. Who is He? Whether I am able to rest in Him depends on the answer I give to that inquiry. I have to ask these questions to drive me back to this library. What God is revealed in the Bible? Let me summarize.

He is a God of knowledge. Here I dare not trust myself to stay, and I need not. I am speaking to men and women who know their Bibles, and the music of that fact is singing its way into your hearts, "He knoweth my down-sitting and mine uprising, my going out and my coming in." He putteth my tears into His bottle; He numbereth the hairs of my head. I lift my eyes to the heavens, and look at the marvels there, unknown, unfathomable, and because He is strong in power not one faileth. He knows.

He is a God of wisdom, which is infinitely more than a God of knowledge. Knowledge is consciousness of the facts. Wisdom is knowledge in its application to necessity.

He is a God of holiness. Let me change the word "holiness" to the old Anglo-Saxon word "health"; He is the God of health, spiritual, mental, physical, and therefore the enemy of disease in spirit, mind, and body. His passion is a passion for completeness, holiness, perfection, and therefore He will make no truce with sin, and will sign no contract with imperfection. He is a God of holiness.

He is a God of might, able to do all His wisdom suggests, and His knowledge proves necessary.

He is a God of justice, judging not by the seeing of the eyes or the hearing of the ears, but by His perfect knowledge of the underlying motive. For that justice the heart of man cries out almost more than for mercy: to be judged ultimately by One Who will take into account the passion that burned and yet always seemed to be defeated. The God of infinite justice.

He is a God of patience, content to wait and walk with man; and in all poetry there never was a dream more beautiful than that He walks with men, accommodating the fine majesty of his goings to the feeble, halting frailty of human failure. The God of patience.

To summarize all, He is a God of love. I cannot grasp the idea in its totality, but it is inclusive, exhaustive, final.

These are all characteristics which merge in the fact of being, and I want some revelation that will help me to condense, to focus the glory that cannot be seen. The answer to that demand came when He appeared in human flesh and tabernacled among men and they beheld Him full of grace and truth. That is the revelation of God. The measure of our rest is the measure of our knowledge of God as He has been revealed to us in Christ. Restlessness is the revelation of lack of familiarity with God as He has been revealed in Christ. To know Him is to know that beyond the autumn is the gracious winter, and beyond it the glorious spring and triumphant summer, the endless cycle of operation that produces the results on which the heart of love is set and makes the very wrath of man to praise Him while the rest He girds upon Himself and restrains.

There are inevitable questions that a man must ask if he meditate on such a theme as this. Am I at rest? Have I learned to wait patiently? The problems are patent enough, God knows, and we know! Only the callous and hard-hearted are unconcerned in the presence of the problems. This waiting patiently is not waiting callously, indifferently; it is not lazing in an armchair while the world drifts on in its agony. It is keen, sensitive, agonizing, consciousness of pain; but underneath is ever heard the anthem of the glory of God assured. The problems are patent enough; we need only merely interpret what I say by the last and most immediate manifestation. I was reading that little poem of Blake, the I am not going to read the "Anguish of the Innocents." poem; I remind you of certain phrases:

A robin redbreast in a cage

Puts all heaven in a rage;

And again,

A dog starved at his master's gate

Predicts the ruin of the state;

And yet again,

A skylark wounded on the wing

Doth make a cherub cease to sing.

Dear old Blake, father of nature poetry, he was very near the heart of God; he knew. If you are insensitive in the presence of the problem of the hour you are not waiting patiently; if there is no whirling agony there is no true waiting. Yet there is a great difference between this whirling motion of the sensitive soul in the presence of agony and the fretfulness of the unbelieving heart.

Wait patiently. How can I do it? I take you back again to the thing I tried to say at the beginning: "Rest in the Lord" is the final note in an ascending scale. What are the things preceding? Trust in Him; that is the first venture of faith. Delight in Him; that is the discovery of His way and His law, and falling into His line. "Commit thy way unto Him"; that is, see to it that He has the governance of your life. Then rest in Him.

This, of course, is not the whole, or else we are but idle and non-effective, and that were to deny the persistent Bible teaching that man is called to fellowship with all the enterprises of God. Is He the God of knowledge? Then it is ours to know. Is He the God of Wisdom? It is ours to enter into fellowship with Him, to act wisely. Is He the God of holiness? Then we must be holy. Is He the God of might? Then we must be strong. Is He the God of justice? Then we are called to do justly. Is He the God of patience? Then we must be patient. Is He the God of love? Then love must master us.

But in order to give true effective service it is necessary that we should learn to rest and to wait patiently for Him. So may He bring our hearts into patient waiting through Christ.