**VOLUME 6; CHAPTER 20 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**WATCHING FOR SOULS by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*They watch in behalf of your souls.*

*Hebrews 13:17*

"WATCHING FOR SOULS" WAS A COMMON PHRASE IN THE speech of our fathers. It has largely fallen out of use in the Christian Church in the present day, or it is carelessly used, with sad ignorance of its Biblical sanctions and its proper values. It is, nevertheless, an illuminative and forceful phrase warranted by the whole Biblical revelation, and remarkably focused in my text, "They watch in behalf of your souls."

While, incidentally, the statement constitutes an argument giving urgency to an appeal, essentially I find in it a revelation of the responsibility of spiritual leaders. I propose, therefore, to come to the consideration of the text, not in its incidental relation to the context, but in its essential revelation of the responsibilities of Christian men and women.

We shall consider, first, the Biblical sanctions of this word of the writer of the letter, and, second, some of its immediate applications.

Commencing with the Biblical sanctions, we are, first, quite simply and necessarily arrested by the central word, the word that gives thought and meaning and direction to the whole conception, "They watch." What is it to watch? If I take the word translated "watch," and feel my way into its heart I find that it suggests sleeplessness. Thayer says that the word has in it "an image drawn from shepherds," and at once, if we recognize that fact, the ampler atmosphere into which we are introduced is suggested. As a sprig of heather suggests the Highlands, or a spray of edelweiss suggests Alpine heights, so this word admits us into the atmosphere of the Divine conception and method.

What, then, is that conception, and what that method? The Biblical relations I endeavored to indicate in measure by the readings of the evening, that majestic word of the Twenty-third Psalm with which we started, "Jehovah is my Shepherd; I shall not want," the graphic picture which Ezekiel drew of the failure of the shepherds and the scattering of the sheep, that tender passage revealing the compassion of the Master's heart in the presence of the scattered sheep; that superb language in which He claimed for Himself the function of shepherd-hood, "I am the good Shepherd," and yet again the tender light of the Galilean shore, when He commissioned Peter and through him all disciples to feed the lambs and shepherd the sheep, until we reached the focused light of our text; and I believe that in the reading there broke on us a true conception of what it is to watch for souls.

The fundamental thought is full of august majesty and broad with the beneficence of Deity. "Jehovah is my Shepherd," said one lonely singer millenniums ago; and down the millenniums and through the centuries his song has been taken up and repeated in lonely hours, in the midst of the rush of life, and as men have crossed the desert where no water is. It is the profoundest word concerning God in His attitude toward the sons of men in their sorrow and in their sin. It is a word which has within it all the other great facts concerning Him. It is the synonym for His Kingship. It is the revelation of the meaning of His Fatherhood. So we start with that fundamental truth that Kingship in the Divine economy is Shepherd-hood, that God is King because He is Shepherd, and that His activity of sovereignty is forever the activity of His Shepherd heart. That is fundamental.

We turn from that fundamental word of the psalm and go through the prophetic writings, selecting one only from the mass of material - that in Ezekiel, perhaps the most graphic of them all, in which we have the picture of the sheep scattered, and hear the thunder of the Divine denunciation, not of the sheep but of the shepherds. Those who should have bound up their wounds and healed the sick and sought the lost, and folded the flock and fed them, all these, said Ezekiel, had fed themselves instead of the sheep, had clothed themselves with the wool while the sheep were left to starve and to be scattered on the heights. Therein lay the supreme condemnation of the false shepherds.

I pass from these Old Testament Scriptures with the fundamental song of the Shepherd-hood of Jehovah, through that stern denunciation of the men who had failed to fulfil their function as shepherds of the people, and I come to the New Testament. I read that when Jesus saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion, and the reason was that He saw them as sheep having no shepherd. I go a little further on in the days of His public ministry, and hear Him in that wonderful discourse which John alone has chronicled, describing His mission in this selfsame figure, "I am the good Shepherd." The hireling - mark the infinite scorn of it, the satire of Jesus - the hireling "fleeth because he is a hireling." The good Shepherd Whose own the sheep are enters into conflict with the wolf, grapples with the evil beast that spoils the sheep, and dies in the conflict. In that infinite mystery which is the heart of Christianity, exhausting all figures, He declares, "I lay down My life for the sheep … I lay down My life that I may take it again," thus prophesying the resurrection whereby He is able not merely to slay the wolf, but to communicate to the sheep the virtue and force of His own life that they themselves may be made strong against the marauding wolf. Finally, interpreting the word of Jesus to Peter by all the symbolism of the ancient economy and the attitude of the heart of Christ, I hear Him charge the Christian man that it is his work to be a shepherd, to watch for souls. Such are the Biblical relations.

From these let us attempt to deduce the Biblical conceptions that are suggested in my text. "They watch in behalf of your souls." The first conception is that of the Kingdom of God under the figure of the flock. There is one verse in the New Testament to which we have often drawn attention, and doubtless you have often noticed its peculiar beauty. Speaking on one occasion to His own disciples, Jesus said, "Fear not, little flock, it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." In the economy of God the Kingdom of God will be the family of God; the family of God will be the whole flock of scattered sheep folded under the one Shepherd, Jesus; or, as He Himself did say, at last, when He has found the other sheep, there shall be one flock and one Shepherd. So that beneath this phrase, which seems to us so simple, we discover the ultimate purpose, the folding of the sheep into one flock, the gathering of the children into one family, the building of men into one ultimate, glorious Kingdom of God. That is the underlying conception.

Glancing again at these Biblical quotations, I find another truth, an immediate and present one - that the Kingdom is not established, that the children are not yet at home, or, to return to the line of our thinking, the sheep are still scattered. Jesus went through all the cities and villages preaching, teaching, healing, and He saw the multitudes, the multitudes of the cities, villages and hamlets, rich and poor, high and low, learned and illiterate, massed humanity. In some senses it would be a most inaccurate thing to say that Jesus never saw whether a man was rich or poor; in some senses it would not be true to say that He was unconscious of the phylacteries that were on the garments of the Pharisees or of the rags of the beggar; but in a profound and deep sense I do affirm He was unconscious of all these things. He was not attracted by wealth, He was not attracted by poverty. Let me change the tense to the present. Christ cannot be the Head of a labor church, He cannot be the Head of a capitalist club; but He is in the club where wealth gathers, He is present when poverty is arguing its necessity and grappling with its problem. He is attracted by humanity, indifferent to the false divisions in His passion for humanity and His determination ultimately to destroy the divisions that separate, and to create one flock and one Shepherd, the very Kingdom of God. He was conscious, and He is conscious today, of the scattered sheep, the fleeced, wounded sheep, the harried, worried souls of men. That is the condition that Ezekiel saw, the condition that Christ apprehended, and which exists until this moment. This London of ours teems and throbs with agony and unrest, sheep having no shepherd, the prey of wolves that raven, marauding by night and prowling by day, and stripping men of the things most precious to them. This is Christ's outlook: the Kingdom is not yet, the children are not home, the sheep are not folded. That vision of the condition of humanity is part of the light focused in my text, "They watch in behalf of your souls."

Tarrying yet a moment longer with these Biblical conceptions, I find the revelation of responsibility involved in the meaning of our text. What is it to watch for souls? Let us go back to Ezekiel and remind ourselves of the things that the shepherds did not do. Ye did not feed My flock, ye did not strengthen them, ye did not heal them, ye did not bind them up, ye did not restore them, ye did not seek the lost! Watching for souls is doing these things. Or I turn from the message of Ezekiel and come to the final, inclusive word of the incarnate Son of God, and I ask, in the light of that great passage in John, What is it to watch for souls? First, it is to enter into conflict with the wolf, and then, at personal cost and suffering and sacrifice, to be patient with the sheep as we lead them back to the fold and to the one great, only Shepherd of souls. Watching for souls demands sacrifice, expresses itself in sleepless vigils, in untiring activity, in going out after those that are lost, and bearing them, in the virtue of expended strength, back to the fold and back to the Shepherd.

So far, I have attempted merely the interpretation of the Biblical sanctions that lie behind this great text. Now, in the second place, I desire to turn to the practical, immediate application of the truth. In this letter occur the great words, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever," and I want to crave your patience for a moment while I say that thing again, asking you to consider whether you really believe it, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever." I am not at this moment interested in the last stupendous word "for ever." I am intensely interested in "yesterday" and "today." What He was He is, what He felt He feels. I ask your patience while I emphasize that. Do we believe it, do we act as though we knew it and believed it? Are we not in awful danger of imagining, somehow, that this crowned Lord of all of Whom we sing is removed far away from the actuality of human pain and suffering and human sin? Have we not some subconscious conception of Him, as in a land of glory where no shadows fall, removed from immediate consciousness of human agony and immediate sympathy with human pain? The proportion in which we are mastered in our thinking of Christ by any such conception is the proportion in which we are misunderstanding Him, and are cutting the nerve of our endeavor in dealing with other men. We have to commence by reminding ourselves that He is the same, His vision of the ultimate is the same, His vision of the present condition is the same, His conception of the responsibility resting upon Himself as the Servant of God in the compulsion of His own nature of infinite love is the same. He has not changed. Did He see the multitudes in the olden days harassed by wolves, fleeced and fainting by the way? So sees He the multitudes of today. Was He moved with compassion then? So is He now. May God deliver us from any false and blasphemous idea that God has no sorrow, that He is impassive and unmoved in the midst of His universe, in the presence of human sorrow resulting from human sin. That is a libel, a lie, a contradiction of the whole Biblical revelation. Faber knew the heart of God better. He sang truly when he sang, "There is no place where earth's sorrows are more keenly felt than up in heaven." At this moment all the surging sorrows of London and the world are focused in the heart of the Son of God. We must start there. To fail to believe the great truth that He remains the same is to be so out of sympathy with Him, so out of touch with Him, as never to be able to watch for souls.

Let that be granted, and then I may proceed. The first thing we need if we are to watch for souls is a clear vision of the ultimate. The responsibilities of the immediate result always from the nature of the ultimate. Watch a builder at his work, at his one small corner of the building! Why that accuracy of eye and the corrective precision of the plummet that every single brick be truly laid? Because, if not to him, at least to the architect under whose inspiration he labors, the ultimate building is in view. That was what Michael Angelo meant when he said that trifles make perfection. That was why he spent so many hours perfecting the curves in the marble. He had seen the angel in the marble, and every movement of the chisel and hammer was directed toward the final, the ultimate. I am more and more convinced that one of the perils of our day in Christian service is that we are so occupied with the immediate that we fail sometimes to lift our eyes and look toward the ultimate, we lose the vision of God's final victory, and so we fail to do the finest work.

The ultimate in the work of Christ is the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth; the ultimate in the work of Christ is one flock and the one Shepherd. It is when that ultimate glory has broken on the soul and possessed it, when that gleaming splendor of the final day of God has surcharged the life of the shepherd; it is then that the immediate becomes instinct with meaning, and that, to quote the Apostle Paul's great word, we labor "that we may present every man perfect in Christ." I pray there may come to every preacher and teacher, to all Christian men and women occupied in service, a very clear vision of the goal toward which God is moving and toward which He calls us to move in comradeship, fellowship with Himself. Christ's work for this world will never be done until there is one flock and one Shepherd, the end of nationalities in the one nation, the necessary cessation of war in the reign of the Prince of Peace, the last of strife and weariness and sin and sorrow in the final victory of the Shepherd Who laid down His life for the sheep.

The process leading to that ultimate includes a method of judgment as well as a method of mercy, There is a day of vengeance. He will not quench the smoking flax until He send forth judgment unto victory. But that day of judgment is not within our responsibility. We have nothing to do with it. This is the day of His seeking, the day of preparation for the Kingdom, and we are to work consistently in our watching for souls with the vision of the ultimate before us, realizing that every man won back to the Shepherd, every little child fed as a lamb of the one great flock, is a contribution to the dawning of the morning that waxes to noon and never wanes to eventide, when the "kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ."

If in order to achieve fulfilment of this ideal of watching for souls a vision of the ultimate is necessary, then also a vision of the immediate is necessary. Here I would speak with great carefulness and with great sympathy, and with strong conviction. What is our view of the men who are without our Christ? Has it ever occurred to you that the word to which I have referred describing Christ's vision of the multitudes is a very strange word, and that it certainly would not have described His disciples' view of the multitudes at that time? It is still more certain that it would not have described the multitudes' conception of their own condition. Remember, it was He Who saw them as sheep not having a shepherd, sheep scattered. They did not so think of themselves. Blindness had fallen on them, hardness of heart, that terrible hardness which is failure to appreciate one's own condition. It was His eye that saw them so. His vision - mark this carefully - of the scattered, fleeced, failing condition of the multitudes was born of this very vision of the purpose of God. What measurement do you put on humanity in order to understand it? If you once see humanity as God intended it to be, then you will understand how far it fails and comes short. Look out over the world today, look out over our own city, our own land to-day, and we see multitudes; we meet them every day, pass through their midst on the highways of the city, gaze on them when they are massed for sport or spectacle, or tragedy. How do we see them? Comfortable, respectable, fairly moral? Are we satisfied with the condition of the multitudes? Then we have not Christ's vision, and that because we lack the life that makes the light as we look. There are some men today who look out on the multitudes and speak to me only of the magnificence of humanity. There are others who speak only of the depravity of humanity. In each case it is a partial vision. The vision of Christ was one that clearly saw the magnificence and possibility of humanity within the economy and purpose of God, the glory of the race; and that clear vision of the dignity of humanity, of the worth of one soul, of the splendid possibility of human life, created His vision of the ruin and the failure of humanity. You and I will never be watchers for souls of men until we see the glory of God's thoughts for them, and in the light of that see the awfulness of their failure. The Kingdom is unrealized, the family is broken, the sheep are scattered! That vision also is necessary if we are ever to become watchers for souls.

Let these things be granted; then the measure in which the life of Christ is our life, the measure in which we have surrendered ourselves to His indwelling, so that His life gives the vision and creates our sensitiveness to the need of humanity, is the measure in which we are prepared for our service.

What, then, is our service? What, then, is our responsibility? If we see that ultimate, if we see this present condition, what is our responsibility? To bring the sheep to the Shepherd. I think perhaps if I stay for exposition I shall rob that statement of some of its power. That is the inclusive declaration of the responsibility of Christian men and women in order to establish the ultimate Kingdom of God, in order to meet the present necessity, to

Lead them to Thy open side,

The sheep for whom their Shepherd died.

It should be true of all Christians, "They watch in behalf of souls," and that watching means that they are incessantly laboring at sacrifice to gather the sheep to the Shepherd.

From these general words of application let me pass, in conclusion, to some particular words. We must recognize, in the life and work of this church and of all churches, that this is our business. Our business is to attach men to Christ. Here are the perils which threaten us in Christian work - the peril that we should attach men to ourselves, and the peril that we attach men to our church. The peril is that the preacher should imagine that when he has gathered a crowd about himself he has done Christ's work. No, I know how this thing searches, how it creates the doubt whether there may not be failure in the very fact that men and women gather about a ministry. I must be true to God and my soul. If I do but gather here men and women to hear me, I am of all failures the most terrible; unless through the things I say I can lead you to my Lord, how I fail! Unless I can attach you to Christ, and bring you to the one and only Shepherd of souls, then I also am a "blind mouth," the most terrible of all human failures. It is true of every teacher in the Sunday school. It is true of the whole Church. You tell me that you have erected your buildings, and that they are now being crowded with men and women who come to the socials and attend the clubs, and you are getting on! Are you leading them to Christ? If not, you are failing utterly. It is not enough to throng the building with multitudes, to crowd classrooms and club rooms with interested, patronizing men and women who will take the material things and imagine they are Christians. Unless you are bringing men to Christ, into first-hand relationship with Him, you are failing.

If that is our business we must prepare ourselves to the enterprise. We must partake of the Shepherd nature, have the Shepherd heart. It is through manifestation of the Shepherd that we must lead souls to Him. It is only as Christian souls constitute the media that they can be avenues of approach to the Shepherd. I must be like Him in my passion, in my patience, in my purity, or I cannot do His work.

Our responsibility is also that of availing ourselves of the resources at our disposal. If I am to feed the flock of God I must be familiar with the sustenance of souls. I must be a student of the Word of God, not merely of its technicalities, but of its dynamic. I must be a man of prayer, or, as I prefer now to put it, a man often talking with the Shepherd Himself if I am to help Him in His shepherd work.

Then it is not merely necessary that we recognize this as our business, and not merely necessary that we prepare ourselves for this enterprise; we must actually give ourselves to the business. That is the business of the preacher in his study, in his pulpit, in his social relationships. Woe be to the minister of Jesus Christ who establishes social relationships with his people of such a nature that he is not able to talk to them about their souls! Woe be to any man in the ministry who becomes so friendly with a member of his congregation at the club that he cannot grip him on the matter of God and eternity when occasion arises!

That is true of the teacher in the class. Dear fellow worker in this great enterprise, teacher in the Sunday school, what are the children and young people gathered about you for? They create your opportunity to lead them to Christ. It is true of all office holders in the church. It is true of the men who seat this congregation; it is true of the choir; it is true of those who preside over the finances of the church. The ultimate reason of everything must be to lead men to His open side, the sheep for whom the Shepherd died.

It is true of the church in the neighborhood in which it exists and in its world relationships. The Church has nothing to do with social relationships, apart from its insistence on the necessity that men shall find their way to Christ. If men want me to come out and help in their fight to get better conditions, I will come, provided always they will crown my King. My business is to present men to Christ and Christ to men in individual life, and then, on the basis of regenerate humanity, to reconstruct society.

This is the business of every church member. This is your central responsibility at home. Fathers and mothers, the supreme word of your parenthood is this - watching for souls. If I have fed my bairns, clothed and educated them, and have given them a start in life, and nothing else, God have mercy on me! Unless I have by some form or fashion, principally by example, led them toward my Saviour, then how I have failed!

It is the business of Christian men and women in their business life. You are responsible, my dear Christian lady, for the servant girls in your home. They are not employees merely. You are responsible for the men you pay wages to - at least, that your influence may be Christian, that you show by your character that you are related to the Lord. It is a blasphemy of the worst kind to say you employ a hundred hands. You employ a hundred men, and for each man who is spirit, mind and body, who is coming into contact with you, you are responsible. By your attitude toward him, by the graciousness of your character, you ought to lead him toward Christ.

Watching for souls, a phrase of the days of our fathers, fallen largely into disuse, misinterpreted in a narrow, mechanical method all too often today, is yet a great phrase, indicating the responsibility and the enterprise of the Christian Church.

May that God Who is the Shepherd of humanity, and Who has revealed Himself in the One Who is the good, the great, the true Shepherd, lead all those of us who rejoice in His Shepherd-hood into such fellowship with Himself that of us also it may be said, "They watch in behalf of souls."