**VOLUME 6; CHAPTER 26 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**PEACE AMONG MEN OF GOD'S PLEASURE by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Glory to God in the highest,*

*And on earth peace among men in whom*

*He is well pleased.*

*Luke 1:14*

THESE WORDS CONSTITUTED THE ANGELIC ANTHEM OF WELCOME to the New Race. The angel messenger had told the shepherds of "a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger." In this chorus the angels expressed their understanding of the significance of the event, "Glory to God in the highest." The term "in the highest" does not signify degree but location; "the highest" in the text stands in contrast to the earth, not necessarily separated from it, but suggesting the fact of the two spheres, earth and heaven.

Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace among men in whom

He is well pleased.

This was more than the song that celebrated the birth of the Babe; it was the song that celebrated the race which was to result from the birth of the Babe. The terms are quite explicit: peace, not toward men, but among men. However much we may differ about the translation and interpretation of that which remains of the passage, about this there is no doubt, that it is not peace or good will toward men, but among men - peace among men in whom He is well pleased. That is at once the limitation of the thought and the indication of the true region of peace.

The significance of the song which the angels sang will be discovered in recognition of the Biblical teaching concerning the interest which angels have taken in this world of ours. Their first song about the world, according to Biblical revelation, is recorded in the book of Job, in that wonderful passage of the Theophany or unveiling of God before the astonished vision of His servant, tried, buffeted and bruised by temptation. In the course of that great unveiling it is declared that when God laid the cornerstone of the earth,

The Morning stars sang together

And all the sons of God shouted for joy.

You will remember that Milton couples these songs - the song of creation and the song of the Advent of the Saviour - in the great hymn of the Nativity, when he sings:

Such music (as 'tis said),

Before was never made.

But when of old the sons of morning sang

While the Creator great

His constellations set,

And the well-balanced word on hinges hung

And cast the dark foundations deep

And bid the welt'ring waves their oozy channel keep,

Such is the first Scripture suggestion about angel interest. They sang in creation.

If Faber was right when he sang that

There is no place where earth's sorrows

Are more felt than up in heaven,

then angel sons had surely merged from the major shoutings of creation's dawn into minor wailings in view of the miseries of men resulting from their sin. I immediately say to you that I think Faber was quite right, that there is no place where earth's sorrows are more felt than up in heaven. All sorrow there is transfigured by the light that we know not yet; all sorrow there is modified, and experienced within its relationship to the infinite movements; but sorrow is surely there, for it is in the heart of God Himself in the presence of human suffering and misery, I repeat, I verily believe that often the angels had sung in minor wailing over the miseries of men.

Now at last, as the angel said to the shepherds, "there is born … in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." To those angel singers the One born was "a second man," "the last Adam." In the view of the angels his birth was a new commencement in human history. From that child lying in the manger they saw a new race springing, and in celebration of the new race they raised their anthem:

Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace among men in whom

He is well pleased.

The first note of the anthem was a recognition of the Source of the New Movement, "Glory to God in the highest." The central note celebrated the issue which had happened that day, "on earth peace." The final note revealed the condition of realization, "among men in whom He is well pleased."

If thus, in this anthem, we discover the note of limitation, and surely it is here, let us remember that the limitation is but declared in order to reveal the condition on which the ultimate purpose may be realized. There can be no question that at last the men of His good pleasure, the men in whom He is well pleased, will be men of all kindreds and races, that, at last, "though a wide compass first be fetched," His victory is secure; that, although the process may be one of conflict and long and painful struggle in the history of the world, yet finally the note of the angel anthem will be found to be the chord of the dominant, and all the music of human conditions will be true to its suggestion.

Let us briefly consider these three things in a slightly different order: first, the issue described, "on earth peace"; second, the condition revealed, "among men in whom He is well pleased"; and, finally, in a closing and brief word, the source suggested, "Glory to God in the highest."

First, then, "on earth peace." Is it not difficult to understand that word? Probably not, in our own hearts and personal experiences as Christian men and women; for already all such as have reposed their trust in this Lord Christ know something of that peace of God which passeth all understanding. But if we look away from these personal experiences, and endeavor to enter into the consciousness of our own times and of the conditions in the midst of which we live, is it not almost impossible to understand this phrase, "on earth peace"? That is to say, the ideal seems far from realizations. If we contrast all that is suggested by this phrase with all that we find in history, how startling is the difference between peace and the perpetual conflict and unrest, the pain and suffering of the world. I do not desire to dwell particularly on matters that are wholly immediate and local, and yet we are all painfully conscious of the actual condition of the world. We are all conscious, for instance, of the fact that the world's national peace is a mockery and a sham, that it is merely an armed neutrality based on suspicion. We are all terribly, and more acutely, conscious of the fact that the very peace of our own life is often rudely broken in on by the shock of strife and catastrophe.

Where is peace? Without staying to deal with other of the evidences of immediate unrest, let us take a broader outlook, and I think a deeper inlook, and inquire what are the underlying reasons of the restlessness of the world? I should be inclined to summarize them thus. First of all - this would not be put first by many, but Christian men must put it first - a moral malady without remedy, that is the profoundest reason of human restlessness. Consequent on that there is the fact of suffering without succor, and often without sympathy. And finally we have the fact of death without hope. Of course, in Christian experience death is not without hope, but neither is suffering without succor, for moral malady is not without remedy. But death without hope is the world outlook; I am not for the moment referring to the larger and more terrible fact of death merging into some experience beyond yet more awful; but to the hard fact of death with its severance, its breaking of ties, and ending of companionship, with no certainty of anything beyond; for there is no certainty apart from Christ. These are the reasons for unrest.

Moral malady without remedy, conflict everywhere between good and evil, between principle and passion. Man is in the midst of conflict, plunged into it at his birth. Whatever theory he may have of the universe, and whatever his philosophy may be, he is face to face with this conflict in his own nature, in his city, in his nation, in the world from the beginning; with this most appalling fact, that victory seems to be forever on the side of evil, "wrong forever on the throne." The outcome is perpetual unrest.

Suffering without succor. Without any attempt now to account for suffering, we recognize that it is here. There is the suffering of poverty - and never believe any man who tells you that poverty is a blessing in the economy of God. It is not so. It would be as untrue as to say that disease comes from God. These things may be overruled by God in the great economy of His grace, and be made instruments by which He perfects character; but poverty has no place in the economy of God for man. But its pain is here. There are also the sufferings of sickness and of persecution. And in Nature there is no proof of the Divine sympathy. Lift out of human history this Christ-child Whose birth we celebrate today, take this Christian fact out of the world, and we cannot prove that God has any sympathy with humanity. The sun will shine as brightly on your dead child as on your living, loving one. Nature will shed no tears for your agony. Poets talk about nature weeping; but in the day of heartbreak nature will prove nothing to you of the tenderness and compassion of God. There are multitudes of souls today suffering without any consciousness of sympathy, and without any immediate succor.

Death without hope. Philosophy has no proof of immortality. In the submerging of the soul in unuttterable agony a man will cry out, "If a man die, shall he live again?" That is an inquiry, but, as in the case of Job, it constantly merges into the wail of unutterable despair, without hope or a gleam of light. We have no proof of immortality if this Christ-child was not born. If all this story is myth, then the world has no sure evidence of a life beyond. These are the things that create the unrest of humanity.

But let us turn to the other side of the matter, and inquire what is peace. Peace is, first, moral rectitude, a perfect ethic combined with a sufficient dynamic, and resulting in a conscience void of offense. That is peace.

Or, again, peace is joy without alloy, the result of an inclusive outlook, the measurement of the part by the whole, the ability to sing "Light after darkness"; and, consequently, a heart full and strong, firm and steady, in the midst of problems which are not yet solved.

Or inclusively, what is peace? Eternal life is peace, the secret of the ages, the transfiguration of death, a spirit homed in God. Such is the experience of peace.

The angels sang "on earth peace." Peace can come only as there shall come to men who are conscious of moral malady without remedy the remedy for that malady. Peace can come only to men who are conscious of suffering without succor or sympathy that is more than sentiment, as there comes to them the succor that takes hold of suffering and transmutes the sorrow into joy, and gives them the assurance that not here and now is all of that which is here and now, but that the ultimate meanings lie beyond, and that in the economy of God they are meanings of perfect realization. Peace can come only to a world where death confronts men, when, somehow, death can be transfigured, and men cease to speak of death, and talk, instead of decease, of exodus, going out. Peace can come only when death is no longer looked on as a harbor of refuge into which the ship all battered escapes, but rather as the harbor from which the ship puts out to sea and finds the ultimate fulfilment of all being. These are Christian ideals, and can be realized by men only when they enter into Christian experience.

We now turn to that which is central to this meditation, the suggestion of the angels concerning the condition of peace, "peace among men in whom He is well pleased." This song was sung, first, because of the birth of the Babe. I take up this gospel in which alone the song is recorded, which is peculiarly the gospel portraying the perfection of Jesus of Nazareth, and I trace the story through a little way in order that we may catch the fuller meaning of the angel song, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men in whom He is well pleased."

I turn to the fortieth verse of the first chapter, and I read:

And the child grew, and waxed strong, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

That was twelve years afterwards, measuring the life by human measurements.

I run on down the same chapter to the fifty-second verse; eighteen more years have passed, thirty years from the hour of the angel song, and now I read:

Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

I go a little further in this wonderful story of His life and I read in the third chapter, verse twenty-two:

A voice came out of heaven, Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased.

Why, then, was the song sung? Because there in the manger lying was the Babe in Whom God was well pleased, which does not suggest that God is not well pleased in the presence of every child, every babe, but which does suggest a difference. It suggests this initial fact of absolute perfection, a new beginning in human history, a strange wonder never to be finally understood. There was the Child, the first of a new race. There is a sense today in which any child that lies in its mother's arms, every little one, is dear to His heart, dearer than to the mother who nurses it. But there were peculiar facts about this Child. As a Boy the grace of God was on Him; as a Man of thirty it is declared that He had grown in favor with God and man. Then Luke tells us that the heavens were opened and a voice declared, Here is the Man in Whom I am well pleased. In Him, then, there is peace, for peace is among men in whom He is well pleased.

And still further we follow the story as Luke tells it, and in the first and second verses of the fourth chapter we read:

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness during forty days, being tempted of the devil.

There He mastered all temptations.

Still reading on in order to discover the music that follows the angelic anthem, we find in the fourteenth verse of the same chapter:

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit.

He went to service and to sacrifice, until, let it be reverently stated, "He offered Himself through the eternal Spirit." All the way from the beginning to the end we see the Man in Whom God is well pleased.

Thus we see peace, focused in one human being, peace in the Man in whom God was well pleased. He was a lowly Man, at first a Babe, then a Boy, then a Man, and through all a Servant. One Who went to death in the fulfilment of His service; and all the way He was a Man of peace.

Now, do not let us be anxious for the moment about the ultimate application of all this, but let us earnestly behold this Man of Nazareth, the Man of peace. If there is one thing more certain than anything else in the revelation of Jesus in these gospels it is that of His peace. In neither of these gospel stories can we find any occasion, any circumstance, any hour, in which He was perturbed. Always He is the Man of peace.

When we come to the final scenes - and I cannot tell you why it is so, but I never come to Christmas now without feeling that the cradle and the Cross are close together - I cannot think of Him Who came and rejoice in His coming without thinking of the ultimate in the mystery of His passion; I say, when we come to those last tragic scenes, we find that the One human being, undisturbed, quiet, and strong, was the Man of peace, not the priests, who were determined to ensure His murder, not the cool, dispassionate Roman Procurator Pilate, who was strangely perturbed; but Jesus only was quiet and at peace.

What was this experience of His peace? A perfect and perpetual victory over sin, the constant transmutation of suffering in His own life, so that under the very shadow of the Cross in the midst of those paschal discourses He could say to His disciples, "My joy"; and, speaking of the deepest thing in His life, the annihilation of death, long ere He was apprehended and crucified, He had said, "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." Even on the holy mount, having come to the fulfilment of His humanity in the splendor of the metamorphosis, He spoke, not of the death He should die, but of the exodus He should accomplish. In these three things I find the secrets of His peace.

But is that all the angels meant? Nay verily! They sang not only of the Babe, but also of the race that was to spring from Him; not merely of peace in the Man of His good pleasure, but of "peace among men in whom He is well pleased."

Now let us turn from Luke to John, and in that gospel so brief in many respects, and yet so full of understanding of the deepest things in the life and ministry of our Lord, we find that in the midst of the paschal discourses, with the shadow of the Cross upon Him, and the last things close at hand, talking to a little group of men, He said:

"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful" (John 14:27).

And for these men that was the day when they were more troubled and afraid than they had ever been in their lives; it was the day when all the restlessness of the world seemed to be their portion, the day when hope was dying down and every gleam of light seemed wholly vanishing, the day when high and holy aspirations seemed doomed to utter disappointment in that He persisted in going out to die! Yet on that day He said, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you."

Then follow the next pages in the gospel of John, telling the story of dark days for them, days in which there came the end of all peace; the moral malady against which He had protested was victorious over Him, and He was murdered, suffering without succor finding its final expression in His untold sorrow, as they watched Him as long as they were able and then fled for very fear; death, which He had seemed to count as a small matter in the whole economy of life mastered Him, and He was put into the grave; and all that after He had said, "Peace I leave with you." I am in sympathy with these men in their sorrow and in their inevitable sense that peace was no more.

Now let us turn to the twentieth chapter. Here we find ourselves in the midst of a little company of terrified souls gathered in an upper room with doors locked. I have no criticism for them. I would have shared their fear. I think I would have been more fearful than they, and hardly been present at all. Suddenly standing in the midst is the same One, the Man of God's good pleasure. What is the first word that passes His lips? "Peace be unto you." It was His answer to their fear. And again in a few moments, "Peace be unto you." It was His preparation for their service. Eight days later, with Thomas the great believer present, again He said, "Peace be unto you." It was the call to faith.

From that moment the number of men of peace in the world was multiplied. Much later John wrote, "As He is, even so are we in this world." Was there ever such a daring word written under inspiration? Yet in this very matter of peace how true it was! The peacefulness of Christ's witnesses under persecution has been one of the world's perpetual wonders.

What created the peace that possessed these men and sent them out in the midst of the world's suffering and conflict and darkness? They shared His peace, What was His peace? Victory over sin. The transmutation of suffering, so that these men - mark the true and deep mystery of the word in Acts - are seen "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name:" Finally, the annihilation of death, for when they write their letters these men will not speak of death as other men speak of death; they will take up His words and use them, and Peter will say, After my exodus, using the very word that Jesus used on the holy mount; and Paul will say, After my departure, that is my going away out into the larger life. These are the secrets of peace, "peace among men in whom He is well pleased."

In a final word, notice the suggestion of the angels concerning the source, "Glory to God in the highest." Salvation must come from God and not from man. Salvation must come out of the heavens to the earth; it cannot arise out of the earth and climb to the heavens. Therefore, glory to God is a necessity as it is a fact.

When the Babe was born a movement began that will issue in a race in which He is well pleased. That was the meaning of Christmas to the angels. Who is this Child? He is the Son of God, the Lord from heaven. He is also the Babe of the new race, Who, not by human will or act, laid hold on humanity and entered thereinto for a new beginning, for the accomplishment of the larger purposes of God. Those angels, then, sang o'er the plains of Bethlehem not of the Babe alone, but of the race.

Take this Christ away and all the conditions of unrest abide: moral malady without remedy, suffering without succor and with no proof of God's sympathy, and death as an appalling darkness out of which no ray of certain light shines and out of which no voice comes, and we still shall have to describe it as "the bourne whence no traveler returns." Take this Christ-child away, then, and peace is impossible.

But the Christ-child is not taken away. We are not merely celebrating a far-off event, we are gathered around the presence of the living Lord Himself, and around all the great eternal facts focused, and rendered visible, by the mystery of Incarnation and by way of the Cross.

Consequently, if our trust is reposed in Him we are men of peace, we are men in whom God by grace is well pleased. Already in us He finds the forces of His own life and of the Son of His love; and He knows that the deepest facts of our lives are those, and that at last they will bring a perfect and final salvation and an eternal peace. Thus while yet we are in the midst of the clash of battle there is peace.

If you take this Christ away, have you any song to sing worth the singing? I know full well that the tragedy sometimes makes faith falter. I know what it is - and if there are those who do not, then let them be patient with me, for I speak not for myself alone - I know what it is in some hour of calamity to say, Where is God? But my question does not alter the calamity; and if I am allowing my unbelief to silence these angels, to hush these bells, to deny this music, then, God help me, what is life?

Oh, hear the song of the angels over all sighing humanity. We are celebrating today the infinite mystery, and mystery it is, of incarnate God. From it all light is streaming, and all songs are coming, all hope is flaming, and we believe that at last there shall be peace.

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;

Let earth receive her King;

Let every heart prepare Him room,

And heaven and nature sing.