**VOLUME 7; CHAPTER 01 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**CHRIST'S CALL TO COURAGE by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven.*

*Matthew 9:2*

*Daughter, be of good cheer; thy faith hath made thee whole.*

*Matthew 9:22*

*Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.*

*Matthew 14:27*

*Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

*John 16:33*

*Be of good cheer; for as thou hast testified concerning Me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.*

*Acts 23:11*

FIVE FAMILIAR PICTURES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT ARE recalled by the reading of these words.

The first is that of a man sick of the palsy, carried by his friends into the presence of Jesus; physically trembling and troubled in heart by the consciousness of sin.

The second is that of a woman struggling to reach Him through the movement and pressure of a jostling crowd, troubled by all the suffering of twelve years, twelve years of physical pain, of divorce, of ostracism, of excommunication.

The third is that of a company of disciples in the midst of difficulties which had arisen in the path of duty. The Master had bid them set the prow of their vessel toward the farther shore, and the wind was contrary, and the waves were boisterous. The picture is that of these men suddenly confronted by a new and nameless terror, a specter of the night, moving over the waters toward them.

The fourth is that of a company of disciples face to face with three facts: first, the fact of their Lord's approaching departure by some way they could not understand, and to some bourne about which they knew nothing; second, the fact of the antagonism of the world to Him and to His ideals, and consequently to them also, if in His absence they remained loyal to Him; and, third, the fact of their own appalling weakness. Or briefly, it is a picture of a company of men troubled by the fear of the future.

The last picture is that of a servant of God in prison, rescued from the mob yesterday, threatened by a new conspiracy tomorrow, troubled by the force of circumstances which hindered the progress of his service.

The central fact in these pictures is not that of the troubled souls. The central fact is that of Christ, and of what He said to these people. To the man sick of the palsy He said, "Be of good cheer, child." To the woman broken, bruised, weary, emaciated, and forlorn, He said, "Be of good cheer, daughter." To the disciples in the midst of the storm, terrified by the approach of the phantom, and to the disciples yet more afraid of the future without Him, He said, "Be ye of good cheer." To the man in the prison, hindered in high and holy service, He said, "Be of good cheer." In each case He challenged fear, and uttered a call to courage, and gave His reason for doing so.

These incidents illustrate and illuminate the whole realm of discipleship, and I bring them to you this morning in order, as I may be helped by the Spirit of God, to fasten your attention upon that challenge of Jesus. I bring them to you as a New Year's greeting, not as my word to you, for that would be very worthless, but as the Master's word to you. "Be of good cheer."

Let us then consider, first, the call of Christ itself; second, the arguments of Christ as we find them scattered over these stories; and, finally, let us inquire what is the way of obedience to this call of our Lord.

First, then, the call of Jesus, "Be of good cheer." Now I take up my New Testament, and I find that these are the only occasions on which we have any record of His using these expressions, and no one else is ever recorded to have used exactly the same expression in addressing men. The word is almost peculiar to Christ. It emerges in the writings of Paul in certain applications; but this personal, direct, immediate call was peculiarly that of the Lord Himself. It is therefore important that we should, with all simplicity, inquire what He really did say. In the Revised New Testament from which I read, you will notice that there is uniformity of translation, that on each occasion we have these words, "Be of good cheer." In the Authorized the translation is, "Be of good cheer" in each case except one; in the record of His speech to the woman, the 1611 translators rendered Jesus' words thus, "Be of good comfort."

Now, without any question, there is a fault in this translation, "Be of good cheer." There is something very bright about it, very hopeful about it; and before I am through I shall show you that I have robbed you of nothing by saying that it is not exactly what our Lord said. Indeed, so to translate it is to miss the deepest value of the word. "Be of good cheer" suggests the result rather than the cause. The actual word of which our Lord made use described the cause, and left us to discover the result. There is another word in the New Testament for cheerfulness. When Paul wrote, "The fruit of the Spirit is ... joy," the thought is that of cheerfulness. But that is not the word here. Cheerfulness will be the outcome of what Christ commanded, but He did not command men to be cheerful. He never dealt with the surface of things. He never told men to smile when they were in agony. He dealt with the underlying agony, and thus called men into such attitude of soul as made cheerfulness possible.

The word employed indicates courage rather than cheerfulness, and, moreover, courage subjectively as a feeling rather than objectively as an enterprise; "Be of good courage" rather than, Do a courageous thing. Our Lord did not say, Forget your trouble by doing something. That may help for the moment, but the agony surges back when the activity ceases. The word that our Lord addressed to the man, to the woman, to the disciples, to the imprisoned apostle, was a word suggestive of that strength of heart which is at once the inspiration of daring and the reason of cheerfulness. The call, then, is to freedom from fear, and to an absolute assurance of safety.

Passing from that attempt to consider the actual meaning of the Lord's word, let us glance at these pictures once more, in order to discover what Christ meant in each case.

There is a conscience troubled by sin; to that man He said, Do not have any fear, be of good courage.

There is a woman's heart trembling through long suffering, which has become destitution; to that woman He said, Have no fear; be full of courage; there is nothing to be afraid of.

Look carefully at those men on board the ship. What was their condition? Intelligence menaced by mystery. I wish I could bring you into real sympathy with those fishermen of blue Galilee. They were men accustomed to the storms that suddenly swept its waters, men who were not often baffled, even when the sea was tossed into fury by Euroclydon. Their chief trouble that night was not that of the storm, but that of the specter moving across the waters. They did not know what it was. Do not, in your superior wisdom, say they ought not to have been frightened at ghosts. That is what you are frightened at this morning! What you are fearing you will find presently to be the Lord Himself! So do not be angry with these men. Try to sympathize with them. Their intelligence was menaced by mystery; and when He came to them, He said, Do not be afraid. There is nothing to be afraid of. Banish panic, establish peace, be of good courage.

Then look at the group of men in that upper room. They were men full of a spiritual aspiration, but threatened by opposition, not merely the opposition of men who were angry with Jesus, and about to crucify Him; but that most subtle and forceful opposition of worldliness in the true and New Testament sense of that word, those materialized ideals for which the enemies of Christ stood, and which had gained so strong a hold upon the heart of the multitudes. That little group of men in the upper room saw Him going. They had been able to believe while He was with them. They had been able, with Him, even though tremblingly, to believe in His philosophy when He said, "Be not afraid of them which kill the body and after that have no more that they can do." But He was going. How were they to be true to that high spiritual ideal, with all the forces of the cosmos as men were interpreting it, against them. To them, thus filled with foreboding, He said, "Be of good courage," there is nothing to fear. Do not be afraid.

And then we come to the picture of Paul, the man of high purpose, and unswerving devotion, who had said, "I must also see Rome," knowing that Rome was the very center of the world, the strategic point from which to proclaim the Gospel and send the messengers of the King along all her highways through the nations. Everything appeared as though he were not going to reach Rome. He was in Jerusalem, and there he had been mobbed, and barely rescued yesterday; and conspirators were planning to murder him tomorrow. Paul was not grieved by reason of his own imprisonment. He was troubled because he was an ambassador in bonds, and his high purpose was being hindered. It was night, when suddenly the Lord spoke to him; and said, "Be of good courage," Paul, there is nothing to be afraid of, neither the mob of yesterday, nor the conspiracy of tomorrow; be of good courage.

Now, I will say the thing some of you are thinking. That is all very well; but if Christ said only that, other men have said it, and it does not help us far. It does mean a little when I am troubled and perplexed, and harassed by fear, and my heart is trembling, to have someone bid me be of good courage. I like the man who comes and says to me, Put on a brave face! I think he helps me for perhaps half an hour. I would rather have such a man than the one who comes and says, I will tell you how you got into this trouble. Put that man out!

But the man who can say to me only, Be of good courage, is not the man I want on this first Sunday as I lift my eyes and try to peer into the mists that lie along the valleys, and wonder what forces are marshaled against my soul. If Christ is going to help me He must give me a reason for courage.

And so I pass to what I think is the central value of the meditation, the arguments of Christ in favor of courage as I find them scattered through these stories.

Inclusively, Christ had one argument with which to confront fear - Himself. There is nothing else to say. To every force which challenges the soul of man He opposes Himself.

In no case does He minimize the antagonistic forces. That is not merely a passing word. That is something to be thought of and remembered. To the man sick of the palsy He did not say, You are quite mistaken about this palsy. You have none. He did not say, There is no such thing as sin, cheer up. Is there anything more deceitful, dastardly, devilish, than to tell that to a man who knows what sin is in his own blood and life? That is not the word of Christ. He was not minimizing the fact of sin; He did not tell the woman who for twelve years had been in the grip of an infirmity that there was no reality in her suffering, that if she would make up her mind there was nothing the matter, there was nothing the matter. Oh, these utterly foolish, devilish things by which men are being deceived. Jesus did not laugh at His disciples because they were afraid of a ghost. He did not even rebuke them for that fear. He did not tell the men in the upper room that there was nothing in the force of the world as against them. He knew its force, He knew its lure, its subtlety, its insidiousness. He did not tell Paul that the opposition through which he had come was nothing. Christ did not, and does not, minimize the reality of the antagonistic forces which await us and confront us. No, what He did in each case was to place Himself between the assaulted soul and the assaulting foe.

Now let us again pass over our stories. He said to the man sick of the palsy, "Thy sins are forgiven." The rulers immediately objected: "This man blasphemeth … Who can forgive sins but One, even God?" To this objection the Lord replied, "Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier to say, Thy sins are forgiven, or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (then saith He to the sick of the palsy), Arise, and take up thy bed, and go unto thy house; and immediately he took up his bed, and departed."

That action on the part of the man was the demonstration of the fact that Christ had dealt with the principle of evil out of which the physical limitation had sprung, that when He said, "Thy sins are forgiven," He had spoken not merely a word of judicial authority but a word of redeeming power. He stood between the sins that assaulted the soul of the man - and righteously assaulted his soul, for had he not been guilty of them? - and the man himself; and therefore He was able to speak the infinite and abiding and perpetual mysterious word of Christianity, the word of forgiveness, the authority and power of which was demonstrated by the new power that appeared in the life of the man.

To the woman He said, "Thy faith hath made thee whole," and before He had said it she was healed. How was she healed? I cannot paint pictures, but there are some I would like to paint, and this is one. Jesus was walking along, with crowds jostling Him; just ahead of Him was Jairus, eager if possible to hasten Him to the house where his little girl lay dying, when, somehow edging her way through the crowd, the woman touched - a better word would be "clutched" His garment with the grasp of the last, despairing agony of a needy soul. Jesus immediately turned round, "Who touched Me?" His disciples reminded Him that multitudes were thronging Him, and pressing Him; but He said, Someone has touched Me, for I perceive that dynamite has gone out of Me. That was the argument of His call, Be of good cheer. His virtue came between her and the assaults of her limitation and pain, canceled them, banished them, lifted her back to life and joy. Daughter, be of good cheer, be of good courage, by My virtue thy need is supplied.

I look at the men as they crossed the sea, and with terror on their faces gazed on the strange, mysterious phantom moving slowly and yet surely toward them over the storm-tossed waters. Christ challenged that fear in the words, "Be of good cheer; it is I." If I but knew how to say that, I need say no more, "It," phantom, ghost, terror, "is I." He did not say to them, Never mind, you do not understand it, it will pass presently, and you will forget all about it. No, out of the heart of the infinite mystery He spoke. That is a parable in itself as well as a miracle.

To the men in the upper room, afraid of the forces of the world that would be against them, He said, "Be of good cheer," and His argument for courage was expressed in the words, "I have overcome the world." Over those very forces which they feared He had been victorious through three and thirty years of life; and in His Cross and in His resurrection He perfected His conquest by the reclamation of the cosmos, and the reintroduction of regenerate men to it as having dominion over it instead of being enslaved by it. In fellowship with Him in overcoming life, men find the very cosmos which man's abuse had turned into an enemy, becoming God's minister of light and healing and help and blessing, co-operating with God in all high and holy purposes and enterprise. This, then, was His argument: I have overcome, I have remastered, I have recaptured the very cosmos. Do not be afraid of it. Find in it, in fellowship with Me, that which shall minister to all your need.

And, finally, in the quietness and silence of the prison He stood between His servant and the brutality of the mob and the subtlety of the conspirators, and Himself was the argument for courage. No longer present among His people in bodily form, He appeared to this man as to one born out of due time in a great crisis of need, when the heart was disappointed because service was hindered, and He said, "As thou hast testified concerning Me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome," and thus He was the argument for courage, the inspiration of cheerfulness.

I think that after that Paul lay down in the prison and had a wonderfully restful sleep till the morning. Be of good courage!

If you will take those stories and go through them again in some half hour when you are alone, I think you will find that there is at least a suggestion of sequence in them. First, be of good courage because thy sins are forgiven by the Redeemer. Then be of good courage because all thy weakness and limitation can be supplied by the virtue that comes from Him. Then, when thy soul is assaulted by some mystery, be of good courage, resting assured that out of the heart of every mystery He will emerge. Then, when the sense of the forces of materialism and of worldliness are opposing thy soul, and thou art conscious of the difficulty of loyalty to Christ and high spiritual ideals, be of good courage, because He has overcome. Then when devoted to high purpose and holy service, thou art beaten, prevented, hindered, be of good courage, for in the silence of the night He will assure thee that He has made the plan of thy service, and all hell cannot prevent thy coming to Rome if He would have thee there.

Whether this is a sequence or not, it is at least certain that the first is the fundamental word, Christ calls men to courage by dealing first with sin, that deepest reason of trouble, of fear, of panic; and He builds the superstructure of His palace of peace on the purging of the conscience and the putting away of defilement.

Now, how are we to obey Him? That is the final inquiry. The importance and difficulty of this are patent. Intellectually we agree when He says to us, Be of good courage; but actually we so constantly fail.

Suffer me to clear the way by one or two negative considerations. How am I to obey Him when He says to me, Be of good courage? By love? Nay, that fails in my experience. By hope? Nay, on many a day that fades from the sky, By faith? Nay, for in my case faith fears oftentimes; it fears as well as falters.

All this may be confession of weakness. You may say to me, You have no right to have these experiences, Love ought not to fail, hope ought not to fade, faith ought not to fear. Well, if they are confessions of weakness, and they may be, they are certainly statements of fact. What, then, is the condition of courage? Love, hope, and faith are the outcome of the fulfilment of a condition. Love fails, hope fades, and faith fears, when that condition is not being fulfilled. The abiding condition of courage is clear vision of the Lord. Change the word "vision," if you will, and say "definite consciousness of the Lord's nearness." Or better, cancel the preliminary words, the vision of, and the consciousness of, and leave only this, the Lord Himself. I change, He changes not. My love still ebbs and flows. His love can never die. Not my faith, not my hope, not my love, are the final conditions of a real courage, but Himself.

Go back over our illustrations. Did that man, sick of the palsy, lose the sense of fear I think he did. How? Because he made himself believe? No. How, then? Because he believed without being able to help it. How? He saw Jesus, he heard Jesus speak, and he believed. The woman's faith procured her healing without banishing fear, for mark the place in the narrative of the word of Jesus. She touched and was immediately healed, Yet she was full of fear. But when she came in front of Him, and told Him all the truth in trembling; and when those love-lit eyes looked down into her sorrow-dimmed eyes, eyes haunted with the fears of all the years, then fear fled, and courage filled her heart. It did not matter to her that she was excommunicated, ostracized, poor; she had seen Him, and fear folded its raven wings and dropped dead.

I am talking out of my own heart, I am a fearful soul, and I am ashamed of the fact. I have been trying to find out how to be courageous. I have found out! God help me to be true to the revelation! It is to see Him! Looking off unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of faith! Consider Him Who endured such contradiction of sinners!

I am speaking to Christian men and women, to those who are familiar with Him in some sense. All our fear and all our panic result from a dimmed vision of the Lord, a dimmed consciousness of Christ. I believe that is the trouble with us all today, individually and in Church life, all these tremors, all these fears result from lack of the sense of His presence.

Another word, and I have done. Have you no fear in your heart at all? There are those who are quite without fear. Well, let them suffer me to ask a question. Why not? I believe that there are men and women who answer my inquiry by saying, Because we have seen Him; because we see Him now. I have no more to say to them. Such men and have found the secret of peace.

But there are others who are not conscious of fear today. Let me press upon them the same question. Why not? I charge all such most earnestly to remember in these days, when there may seem in their case to be no cause for fear, no trembling, no panic, weakness, foolishness, that any reason for absence of fear, short of the vision and consciousness of Christ and confidence in Him, is false and your confidence is misplaced, and it may be that before this first Sabbath day of the year be gone to its last hour the crack of doom will come to you, out of the light will come the darkness, and from behind the mountains will rush innumerable foes to assault your soul. There is no refuge for the soul of man other than the Lord Christ.

But now, finally; trembling, terrified, troubled souls, I pray you look and listen! Look to your Lord, and with eyes fastened upon Him listen to His word, "Be of good courage." That means, when He says it, that He puts Himself between thy soul and all the forces in hell and earth that may be against thee.

What shall we say to Him? Well, I am prepared to say that because of what He is my heart is full of courage. I believe, I hope, I love! And having this confidence in my own heart, my message is expressed perhaps most perfectly to my own consciousness by one of those great old hymns of Charles Wesley. Let me conclude with it:

Surrounded by a host of foes,

Stormed by a host of foes within,

Nor swift to flee, nor strong to oppose,

Single, against hell, earth, and sin,

Single, yet undismayed, I any,

I dare believe in Jesu's name.

What though a thousand hosts engage

A thousand worlds, my soul to shake?

I have a shield shall quell their rage,

And drive the alien armies back;

Portrayed it bears a bleeding Lamb;

I dare believe in Jesu's name.

Me to retrieve from Satan's hands,

Me from this evil world to free,

To purge my sins, and loose my bands,

And save from all iniquity,

My Lord and God from heaven He came;

I dare believe in Jesu's name.

Salvation in His name there is,

Salvation from sin, death, and hell,

Salvation into glorious bliss

How great salvation, who can tell!

But all He hath for mine I claim;

I dare believe in Jesu's name.