**VOLUME 7; CHAPTER 03 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**HIGH PURPOSE, FAILING AND FULFILLED by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee upon the waters. And He said, Come. And Peter went down from the boat, and walked upon the waters, to come to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and took hold of him, and saith unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were gone up into the boat the wind ceased. And they that were in the boat worshipped Him, saying, Of a truth Thou art the Son of God.*

*Matthew 14:28-33*

THIS IS THE STORY OF ONE OF THE MOST WONDERFUL PRE-PENTECOSTAL experiences of Peter. While it reveals an element of failure, that is not its only quality, neither is it its chief one. That element of failure, however, has so impressed us that we are in danger of failing to observe that it was failure on a singularly high level, failure in an hour of exalted and Christ-honoring experience. While we must not ignore the failure, we ought to consider it in the light of the whole story, for it is a story full of bright and tender light.

In the paragraph there are two sequences, separated by a very definite break. Matthew made use of a well-known Hebrew literary form in writing this story. It is called polysyndeton, and consists of the linking of event to event by the repetition of the word "and" in order to indicate a sequence. You will bear with me if I draw your attention to it by a somewhat grotesque emphasis in reading. The first sequence is found in verses twenty-eight and twenty-nine:

"And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee upon the waters. And He said, Come. And Peter went down from the boat, and walked upon the waters, to come to Jesus."

The sequence is quite as evident, and even more marked the second part of the story, beginning in the middle of verse thirty:

"And beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, Lord save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and took hold of him, and saith unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were gone up the boat, the wind ceased. And they that were in the boat worshipped Him, saying, Of a truth Thou art the Son of God."

Between these two parts of the one story, constituting two sequences, there is a sudden break introduced by the opposite word "but": "But when he saw the wind, he was afraid." Immediately we are brought into a new set of circumstances. Then as suddenly as we come to the next "and," which is not so much the beginning of a new sequence as the resumption of the first, and the process to the climax which was at first intended. By that process we discover our divisions for this evening's meditation.

Let us consider, first, what this story reveals of an exalted experience, that of Peter, chronicled in the first sequence; second, what the story reveals of sudden defeat recorded in the break that interrupts for a moment the movement of the sequence; and, finally, what the story reveals of fulfilled purpose in the second sequence. Briefly: an exalted experience, a sudden defeat, a fulfilled purpose.

I particularly desire to lay emphasis on the first part of this story, that of the exalted experience of Peter. Over and over again it has been affirmed that his desire was one of presumption. The answer to that charge is that when he expressed his desire his Master said, Come, and He never encouraged mere presumption. We must look carefully at the story and attempt to understand it a little more particularly if we would gather its full value.

In that first sequence we have the record of a great venture, of the Divine warrant for that venture, and of the great adventure which resulted therefrom.

The great venture is recorded for us in these first words: "And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee upon the waters." We are immediately arrested by the fact that our story begins with this word "and," and therefore cannot be considered complete in itself. We must go back, then, in order to seek the inspiration of the request of Peter. Here we need not tarry, for the whole story is very familiar. The disciples had been sent by the Lord across the sea. In obedience to His command, they had set the prow of the vessel toward the opposite shore; and when the wind was contrary, instead of doing that which would have been comparatively easy, tacking, and so finding the wind helpful instead of a hindrance, because loyal to the Lord, they kept the prow of the vessel toward the shore which He had indicated; therefore the wind was contrary, and the waves threatened to engulf the boat. Suddenly there was added to the terrors of the storm the nameless terror of the approaching phantom, and quite as suddenly the phantom, with all its terror, had merged into the Presence and the infinite music of the Master's voice, "It is I; be of good courage."

It was then that Peter said, "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee upon the waters." If we are at all to appreciate the value of this story, we must attempt to discover the mood of the soul of Peter when he made that request. Imaginatively I am with him in the boat. With him I have been conscious of the rising of the waves, the beating of the wind, and the threatening perils. With him I have lost the fear of the storm itself, the fury of the elements, in the new, fresh fear of the approaching phantom. Suddenly with him I have known all fear banished by the consciousness of the Master's presence and the sound of His voice.

By coming thus into sympathy with Peter in those previous experiences we discover that when he said, "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee upon the waters," he was expressing a desire for fellowship with his Lord in an activity beyond that which is possible to human weakness. It was a high hour of spiritual experience. The mood of his soul was an exalted one. He asked that he might be permitted to make a great venture in fellowship with his Lord in those powers that made Him superior to the forces and perils which had threatened to engulf their frail bark. Observe, moreover, that the method of the venture was that of absolute obedience. The very request was obedience on the part of Peter to the command of the Master, "Be of good courage." Let me be courageous indeed; let me prove my courage; let me enter into all the possibilities of courage by walking on these waters; let me climb the higher heights and prove superior to the forces which filled my soul with terror not an hour ago. It was a high and exalted hour of spiritual desire and vision, and he waited for orders: "If it be Thou, bid me come." It was not a venture inspired by pride or presumption; it was a venture under the authority of Christ, waiting for His command. I wonder whether we really can follow Peter in his experience at this moment. It was such an hour as comes not often to a human soul; it was such an hour as, ever and anon, comes assuredly to every follower of the Lord, an hour when new vision of the Lord's power produces in the soul a great aspiration after closer fellowship with Him in the exercise of that power, an hour when the Lord, having broken upon the spiritual consciousness in new glory, the heart desires to share His mastery over the forces that threaten to engulf the life. It was a high and holy aspiration, a passionate desire to do exactly what he saw his Lord was doing.

I think that even that attempted analysis of the mood of the man's soul and understanding of his request would not help us, and would hardly carry conviction, unless we had that word which follows, the word of Jesus, that answer that came across the storm-tossed waters, and was heard by the man who made the request, the single, quiet word, "Come." That was admission of the possibility of the impossible. It was a call to Peter to prove in actual experience both his Lord's own challenge, "It is I; be of good courage," and Peter's answering challenge, "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee." "Come," said the Lord; the impossible is possible in that mood of the soul, in that attitude of the heart, in that consent of the will.

Yet we have the whole story before us, and we know there was more than that in our Lord's word. He knew perfectly well that within a few minutes that man would be floundering in the waves, and yet He said, "Come." By that "Come" He called Peter to the discovery of weakness in himself of which he was unaware, and that in order to make a new discovery of the power of his Lord in the victory and realization of the very desire that first prompted his request. "Come," said Jesus, the impossible is possible in that mood of the soul. "Come," said Jesus, and prove the challenge of My word, "It is I," and answer the inquiry of thy word, "If it be Thou." "Come," said Jesus, and discover the weakness that lurks within your own heart in order that I may bring you to a new realization of My power, and that through proof of weakness you may find mastery, that in fellowship with Me you may fulfil the high aspiration of the soul which asks to do the impossible.

That call of the Master was immediately followed by the great adventure. Here I ask you to notice with what particular care the evangelist records the fact: "Peter went down from the boat, and walked upon the waters, to come to Jesus." He did the impossible thing. It is not the story of a man who, foolhardy and impulsive, ventures over the side of a boat who, immediately sinks. It is the story of a man who, suddenly lifted to a wonderful height, saw the possibility of the impossible in fellowship with Christ; asked for permission, waited for orders, and, having received them, obeyed and actually walked on the waters just as his Lord had been walking on the waters. His Lord said "Come," and without hesitation Peter yielded his will to the will of his Lord. With what result? He placed the frail, feeble foot of his humanity on the wave, and he did not sink; he was upheld; he did the impossible thing under the authority of his Master; his will was yielded to his Lord, his body was yielded to his yielded will, and between the frail man and the Lord Christ a union was established so that as he touched the waves Peter did not sink beneath them. He "walked upon the waters, to come to Jesus."

That was a great moment. Whatever follows cannot undo that experience. Within a very few minutes the waves were threatening to engulf Peter! Yes, but he had walked on them! However much I fail and falter today, and the waters buffet me, I have walked on them. Whatever follows cannot undo the experience. Nay, rather, the experience will have its effect on anything that follows. As presently we see this man when the waves are engulfing him, and hear his cry for help as he sinks, we know that the cry is the result of the demonstration of his Master's power which he received when he accomplished the impossible.

Now we turn to the second stage of the story, the account of a sudden defeat. Because this part of the story is the best known, we need not tarry with it. On the other hand, because it is here in spite of the exalted experience, we must not omit it. There are three things I shall ask you to note. First, the reason of the defeat, "He saw the wind"; that was the assault of sense. The sensual and the spiritual are close together; but they are forever antagonistic. One must always reign, and whichever reigns masters the other. If the sensual reigns, the spiritual is dwarfed and imprisoned. If the spiritual reigns, the sensual is kept within true bounds and never allowed the mastery of the life. Suddenly, while Peter walked on the waters, his soul was assaulted through the senses, he became conscious of the fierceness of the wind, and the anger of the waves; and with his eye removed from the Master he became conscious of that assault, he felt its power. What next? Not immediately the sinking, but first the spiritual experience. "He was afraid." As the spiritual and sensual are always close together and forever antagonistic, so also are faith and fear; but they are mutually exclusive. Where faith reigns, fear has no place; where fear reigns, faith is driven forth. In the moment when Peter yielded to the assault of the senses and, taking his eyes from the Lord, looked at the waves and became conscious of the winds, fear dispossessed faith. The failure of faith came when he became conscious of self as opposed to winds and waves. Then he knew the actuality of his humanity, its weakness and its inability to walk in the difficult and impossible place.

Immediately following came the material, physical expression of that spiritual experience of the failure of faith, "beginning to sink." Paralysis of power followed when the wavering of faith failed to make connection with the Lord. He found the waves too weak to hold him, strong enough to drown him, and he began to sink.

That was a sad experience, but it was not the final one. The sadness of the failure does not for a single moment prove that the adventure of faith was unwarranted. The fact that a man today is failing, faltering, sinking, engulfed by waves on which he ought to be walking, does not call in question the fineness of the heroism, the splendor of the high hour of vision, when he made his adventure of faith. The sinking is not the inevitable sequence of the walking. The sinking is the outcome of failure to keep in close connection with the Lord, resulting from the assault of the senses, so that fear takes the place of faith, paralysis the place of power, and he is back again on the ordinary level of human life.

So we come to the second sequence, which tells the story of fulfilled purpose. Once again in Peter we have a great venture of faith, "Lord save me," as great a venture of faith as that in which he had said, "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee upon the waters"; but the mood of the soul was different. The mood of the soul when Peter asked to walk on waters was that of high vision, holy ecstasy, a new aspiration after power. Now the mood of the soul was that of a sense of defeat. The high possibility was passing in paralysis, the sense of strength that came to him as he walked on the waters was ebbing away. Out of the depths and sense of helplessness, in the agony of conscious weakness, he made another venture of faith. It was no longer a request that he might be permitted to make some high adventure, it was no longer a request that he might be permitted to do anything; it was rather a request, helpless, direct, urgent, agonizing, to the Lord to do everything; but it was the request of faith. I believe you will discover its inspiration in the fact that Peter, in that hour of sinking, when the waves were engulfing him, saw the Lord still superior to wind and waves. With that vision of the Lord still victorious, where he was failing, faith expressed itself again, and made a new venture, "Lord, save me".

What followed? "And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and took hold of him." That was the first thing, the hand of power. Closely following came the word of love, rebuking Peter, and revealing the secret of his failure. "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Little-faith is one word in the Greek; old Trappe the Puritan translated it petty-fidiam, small-faith. Jesus revealed the secret of failure in the question, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" What does "doubt" mean here? I shall seem to rob it of its significance if I am literal. Why didst thou duplicate? That is the root significance, not the final interpretation. Why didst thou think twice? Surely not that, you say! Yes, just that. But is it not wise to think twice? It depends on what the first thought was. Dwight Lyman Moody once told me that the only mistakes he ever made in his life were when he took time to think twice.

Little-faith - it was a beautiful, gentle word, but a rebuking word. Little faith: do not accuse me of irreverence when I say it was a nickname, such a name as love will invent when it desires to rebuke. Peter was Little-faith because he thought twice. "One thing I do" is better. If that had been true of Peter he would never have sunk. It was the thinking back on the decision of a high resolve, it was pausing to question the resolution formed in a high mood of soul, that caused his failure.

Jesus did not say that to Peter until He had saved him. He did not bend over Peter in the waters and say to him: You see what you have done for yourself; if you will confess it I will help you out. No, first the hand was outstretched, and the mighty power of Jesus lifted him; then when Jesus had placed him back on the waves He looked at Peter, and with a smile of tenderness and that sweet tone of which no other friend is capable, said, Little-faith, why did you think twice?

And now Peter walked on the water again. He did the very thing he wanted to do at first. First, he did it; second, he failed to do it; but, third, he did it, he walked back with his Lord on the water to the boat.

I like to look at these two sequences and see how they balance each other; there were three movements in the first, and there were three in the second, and they stand over against each other.

"Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee upon the waters." That is the first movement in the first sequence. "Lord, save me." That is the first movement in the second sequence. The second movement in the first sequence is this: Jesus said, "Come." The second movement in the second sequence Is this: "Jesus stretched forth His hand, and took hold of him, and saith unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" The third movement in the first sequence is this: "Peter went down from the boat, and walked upon the waters, to come to Jesus." The third in the second sequence is this: They walked on the waters and went back into the boat. It was a high hour for Peter when he suddenly thought that if indeed it were Jesus it would be possible to do the impossible thing; it was a high and glorious hour of light and vision and power in which he rose superior to the forces that master trammel and limit. Then came the defeat, the wind and the waves, and paralysis, and sinking. But that is not the last thing. The last thing is, he walked back with his Lord over the waters.

Where did Jesus take him? Back to the boat, to the commonplace, to the everyday. High hours are given to us, and they all have their value, and if we will but answer their lure, their call in the strength of our Lord we shall have marvelous experiences of power to do impossible things; but He will take us back to the boat, we must cross the sea in the ordinary way.

Yes, but there is still something more. Jesus went with Peter into the boat. He is not only the Lord Who Himself is able, and Who enables others, to do impossible things - He the Lord Who can walk the sea from shore to shore, yet He will stay in the boat with His people as they take the commonplace way. Matthew tells us that so they crossed over to the other side. I turn to the story in John. He does not tell us about Peter's heroic attempt and failure; he tells about the storm and he tells us that when Jesus came on board, immediately they were at the land whither they went. Was that a miracle? Oh, no, that was the canceling of distance in the comradeship of love. Matthew says, We crossed over; we had all the distance to do, and we did it and worshiped as we did it, for He was with us. John says, We were there at once because the Lord was with us in the commonplace boat.

Hours of exalted aspiration are to be prized, and they are to be acted upon. They will surely come to us. To every child of God, to every man and woman of faith there are sure to come hours when suddenly some new possibility of power is seen. Such hours are to be prized, and they are to be acted upon; and they are to be acted upon as Peter acted, in obedience to the Lord, waiting His word, seeking to know His will. The impossible is possible to faith, and there is no need to sink. Here, as I have often had to say, I am speaking of things that are in advance of my own actual experience; but I know the truth of them. Peter need not have sunk, and I need never sink in such circumstances. The life triumphant over storms and waves and billows is possible.

But we do sink. We also know the assault of sense, the hour in which we see the waves and the wind in its effect on the waves. Some of us are seeing that tonight, children of God, believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, men and women who have known high hours of vision, glorious hours of victory, but who came up to the service in the house of God this evening discouraged, frightened about tomorrow. They are conscious of the assault of the senses. They are looking at the waves, listening to the howling of the wind; they are calculating the number of the demons from the standpoint of their own personal life and power. Faith is giving way to fear, power is being paralyzed. What shall they do? Let them do exactly what Peter did; cry out, "Lord, save me." But yesterday we said, Lord help us to do this thing, let us do this in Thy strength, energize us for high activity, nerve us for victory. But we cannot say that now; buffeted, bruised, and broken, the billows are overwhelming us. What then shall we, say? It is no use asking Him to help us do anything; we are failing, sinking. Then what shall we do? Let each cry, "Lord,save me," do everything, undertake for me.

I am after the man who is buffeted by the waves, I do not know who he is; and let those of you who cannot follow me be patient, I am talking to some buffeted soul. Let any man or woman thus buffeted, cry out, Lord save me. That is the cry of faith, and as surely as it is made, that hand will be outstretched to grip and hold you; and He will look at you presently, when He has saved you, and He is quite sure He gripped you, and He will say, O Little-faith, why did you doubt? He never rebukes the soul in whom the principle of faith is found, however much it waver, until He has restored that soul to the place of power. You will find that all through tile Bible. You will find it in the parable which we call the parable of the Prodigal Son. Have you ever thought how unwise a thing it was, from the standpoint of worldly wisdom, for that father to go and meet the boy? Imagine him running to meet the boy, running to meet him in his dirt, embracing him in his rags. Is not that all wrong? Is not the proper thing first to induce the young man to recognize what he has done, and to hold him aloof until he confesses his sin? That is what you and I would do - unless the boy were our own; but that is not what God does. He takes the sinner in his rags and sin and filth, and wraps round him His arms of love; then the boy confess. Hold him aloof and demand from him a confession of his guilt, and you harden him - or you would if I were the boy. Let me lay my proud head on the bosom of God, and my heart is broken, and I will sob out all the story of my sin. "Immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and took hold of him," and then He rebuked Peter; but never until He was walking on the waters with Peter. That is our Lord. That is our Master.

The final word is that at last in comradeship with the Master our highest aspirations are fulfilled. Do not miss that from the story. Do not look on that early sequence as a high dream of faith that was utterly defeated. Do not think of Peter in that moment as being on some altitude which he never reached again. He reached it again. He reached it by the way of defeat. The Lord brought him to His side, and walked back with him over the waters to the boat. That is what Jesus did to the very end. That is what He meant when He said to Peter, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice. Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. You have asked Me where I am going. I am going to prepare a place for you, and in spite of your denial of Me I will come again and take you to the place I am getting ready for you.

Fainting, failing, faltering hearts, take courage! That high moment of soul when you saw the possibility of doing the impossible is yet to be realized, and even though you say I started on the way and was victorious for a week, a month, a year, but I am down again, and the waves are beating me and the wind is mastering me, the Master Himself is at hand. Cry out to Him, and His hand will be on you in power, and the sweet rebuke of His love will be in your ears; then He will walk with you on the waters for a little way, and then He will take you back to the boat - from Sunday to Monday, from the hill to the valley, from ecstasy to everyday experience; but He will be there with you, and the memory of the hour of vision and of triumph will be to you a perpetual inspiration. So may we take heart and be filled with new faith, and in comradeship with our Lord go forward through the storms until He brings us to the desired haven.