**VOLUME 7; CHAPTER 04 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE VALUE OF VISION by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint.*

*Proverbs 29:18*

THIS IS AMONG THE "PROVERBS OF SOLOMON WHICH THE men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out." It is the crystallization into a brief sentence of a national principle of the first importance. It must be interpreted in the atmosphere in which was written, and its terms must be explained therefore by what they signified to those who made use of them.

The central word is most evidently the word "vision." The word means, quite simply and literally, sight, and refers both to the thing seen and to the power to see it. "Where there no vision," the thing seen; "Where there is no vision," the power to see, "the people cast off restraint."

But the word had a particular value in the Hebrew economy, referring perpetually to a definite and specific revelation of God to the people. In the days of Samuel's childhood "there was no frequent vision." The word of God was precious in the sense of being rare, and the declaration that the word of God was rare is immediately explained by the affirmation that there was no frequent vision, and it is thus evident that the word was used of some definite revelation of God made to His people. Let us bear in mind that value.

The Hebrew word which is translated "cast off restraint" in the Revised Version, and "perish" in the Authorized Version, means very literally to loosen, to dissolve, to separate, to break up, or as I like to say, using a very simple colloquialism, to go to pieces. "Where there is no vision the people go to pieces." The Revised Version has simply given us a symptom of the disease, not the malady itself. One of the symptoms of the disease assuredly is anarchy, "The people cast off restraint." That which causes anarchy is that the people themselves are dissolved, loosened, broken up, have gone to pieces.

If we take these words in the atmosphere of the times in which they were written, with all reverence we may change out text into words far less beautiful, and used only for the sake of interpretation: Where there is no direct revelation of God to men, the people go to pieces, break up, perish. Where the people lack clear vision of God, that is, are ignorant of His revelation, unacquainted with His will as it is declared, they lack the principle of cohesion and continuity, they are dissolved, they go to pieces.

That conception is central to the history of the Hebrew people as given in the Scriptures. The text itself is among the words of Solomon, a man in whose reign the vision faded. There was no more disastrous failure in the history of Israel than that of Solomon, a man who was punctilious in his observance of externals and neglected the essential, the spiritual verities; who attempted to solace a great people by ostentation and material magnificence, and undermined the kingdom. The vision faded, and the moment the spell created by the presence of the magnificent King Solomon was broken, the people went to pieces: Jeroboam and Rehoboam, the divided kingdom, with all the appalling sequence of the terrible years. That is the man who wrote these words, "Where there is no vision, the people go to pieces."

To go back in history, the graphic description of the condition out of which the mistake of clamoring for a king arose is found in these words: "There was no frequent vision." Men did not hear the word of God, it was rare; there was no continuous traffic with heaven, there was no commerce with the spiritual, no listening for God and to Him. With what result? The people went to pieces; they lost their high ideal of the theocracy and clamored for a king. That was the beginning of the ruin of the kingdom itself.

The same thing is graphically described as the condition preceding the reformation under Asa. Israel had not known the true God, there was no "teaching priest," an arresting phase in itself.

Then we have those wonderful words of the prophet who was neither a prophet nor the son of the prophet, by which he meant to say he was not ordained, not recognized by the schools of the prophets, the herdman of Tekoa who broke upon the people in thunder with a great message. He described the condition as that of "famine for the Word of God." With what result? The young men and maidens thirsted and were weary; they went to pieces, because there was no vision, no dealing with God.

My purpose this evening is to take that principle and see what it means in the case of the great continent of South America, which we are trying during the course of the winter months to understand in order that we may know our responsibility. In previous sermons I have spoken of the geography the peoples of South America. Its geographical situation and conditions are attracting the attention of the whole world. Its peoples are presenting grave problems to missionary enterprise because of their past history. Moreover, I have declared in passing that the supreme need of the people of South America is twofold: moral dynamic, and spiritual vision.

The text which I have taken puts these two things into their proper relationship. Moral dynamic is always the outcome of spiritual vision. In this sense also the text is true. When there is no spiritual vision morality goes to pieces. That, unless I sadly mistake, is what Harold Begbie has tried to put before us in his last novel, The Challenge, a significant title. I am not going to describe the novel. I have read it, and advise you to read it. If I may summarize its teaching in a few words, this is it: the only challenge to immorality is religion.

That is the message of my text concerning men and concerning the nation. If these great peoples of South America are to be made strong nationally, they must be made strong individually; and if they are to be made strong individually, it must be by vision in the Old Testament sense of the word, by revelation.

In this fact we have the sanction and compulsion of Christian missions. Let us say it boldly: We have the true vision of God, we have His final revelation, for "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in the Son," in the Son Who is "the effulgence of His glory, and the very image of His substance." Vision through the Son is our greatest possession. It is in the light of that vision that we are assembled for worship in this hour. It is in the light of that vision that we live our lives as Christian men and women. It is in the light of that vision that we are ready and prepared to carry our burdens, to endure restraint, to win victories, to enjoy the high and holy ecstasy of our fellowship. We are, therefore, humanly responsible for those who lack our vision. "Humanly," you say. What do you mean? I could understand it if you argued that it is a Divine compulsion that is laid upon us. It is a Divine compulsion, but I choose to stay on the lower level, the level of human responsibility. Is there any man in God's world more despicable than the man who tells you he has invented a cure for cancer, and then proceeds to make profit out of it and does not give it to the world? If any man has discovered that which will touch the dire disease with sure healing, he owes it to humanity to tell humanity the secret, even at loss to himself. That is the human sanction; it is Divine at last, I grant, for all high human sanctions are at last Divine; but that is a sanction which will recognized by the man who denies our Christ. Therefore I say that we Christian men and women who have indeed seen the vision, and who have found it to be a vision that heals and helps, our bounden human duty is to see to it that that light is given, so far as we are able to give it, to all people who sit in darkness.

That conception of the sanction and compulsion of missionary endeavor is at the same time a revelation of the sphere of our operations. Where are we to take the light? Wherever people are in darkness. Yes, but South America is not a heathen country. I am told I must not so speak of it. Are the people in darkness? If they are, that is a sphere for missionary operations. That is what we have to discover. That is what Church of God in the homeland is compelled to consider. It is to that subject I ask your attention from this moment forward.

There are two things I want to do in as few words as first, to state the conditions of the people, and then apply the principle of the text.

How shall I describe the condition of the people in South America? I am speaking for the moment, not of the Indian tribes, but of the people of Latin America. I know the difficulty of the task; yet there are certain outstanding facts from which there can be no escape.

There exists among these peoples a certain courtliness of manner under appropriate conditions, and an absolute absence of it under other conditions, a courtliness of manner which is conditioned by the etiquette of social, civic, or national functions, but which passes directly when no such claim is set up. The people are rapidly increasing in wealth, and are pre-eminently lovers of pleasure and display. They are - and the descriptive phrase I use is in some senses an ugly one because of its apparent flippancy - a people characterized by a jovial disregard of truth, a disregard of truth that is easy and careless. They are noted for a lack of conscience, and consequently for widespread distrust and deceit; abounding intemperance, most appalling looseness in all matters of the sexes, widespread indecency of language, and such indecency of action that if you visit the great cities you will never permit your daughters to walk in the streets alone.

In family life there is a very low standard of social purity, and consequently a low standard of homelife; homelife is lacking in sanctity, and therefore lacking in comfort, and appallingly lacking in discipline.

In the social conditions there are things that cannot be named in the assembly of the saints: the loosest of marriage customs, an appalling condition of illegitimacy, so that it has been declared that the percentage of illegitimate births is sometimes thirty, fifty, or even greater.

Politically, there is perpetual unrest; while they now have greatly improved constitutions, for all have been modeled on that of the, United States of America, there is lack of administration - the machine lacks the true motive power.

Inclusively, because there is no vision, the people are dissolved; the principle of cohesion and strength in the national life is missing.

That leads us naturally, necessarily, to the lack of vision. Two mistakes are constantly made about South America in speaking of it in this respect. First of all, it is described as a Christian country, and it was because it was so described that it was shut out from consideration by the great meetings of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference. In the second place, it is affirmed that it is a Roman Catholic country. That is not wholly true, for there are still to be found vast numbers of Indians untouched by Roman Catholic influence. Alan Ewbank said, "If you start away at the north and go right down to the south of the continent, you can travel in heathen lands, among people who do not know Who God is. The whole of that Southern continent, except the fringes around the edge, should be colored heathen." About that section of the population there is no question: they lack vision. Here Romanists and Protestants agree. In paganism there is no true vision of God. It will at once be agreed that among these people there is room and demand for our evangelism.

I turn then to the countries where Romanism is without any question the dominant religion. I cannot touch on this subject without recognizing that our campaign - I think I may so describe it now - for quickening interest in that continent is stirring up a good deal of criticism in England. I am receiving a good many letters of protest. I was speaking in Liverpool recently, and after the meeting received a long letter in which the writer charged me with historic ignorance. The only comfort I obtained from the letter was in the last sentence, "You ought to know better, seeing you are a clergyman of the Church of England"! I have had sent to me only this week newspaper cuttings criticizing certain things I have said and an extract from a book that was published in 1911, called Peru of the Twentieth Century, by Percy F. Martin, F.R.G.S., in which he protests against all Protestant work in the country, and affirms that he has "no religious prejudices whatever," which it is quite easy to believe. I have received with this cutting a letter written from this neighborhood by a Roman Catholic, ten pages in length, kindly, courteous, Christly in spirit, but protesting, declaring that we are ignorant of what the Church of Rome has done in South America, and charging me - and that is the special reference I make in regard to this letter - with lack of charity and with slandering the clergy of the Roman Catholic church.

In speaking in public on this subject I have been very careful to distinguish between Roman Catholicism as it is in South America and as it is in England. I believe that underneath they are one; but I quite recognize that there is a vast difference. Moreover, I have always been careful, and shall ever remain careful, to distinguish most particularly between individuals and the system. I am perfectly sure that in the Roman communion there are saints of God; I have known them personally; I have numbered them among my closest friends; and far be it from me to say anything to wound them in the matter of their personal relationship to Jesus Christ.

But it is impossible to be blind to the influence which Rome has exerted in Latin America. I want to say with regard to that one charge, and I want you to hear me very carefully, when we are charged with slandering the Roman clergy in these countries, our appeal will be from Protestantism to Rome itself. I have another letter here, and in it are a few words that have come from Brazil, written by a Roman Catholic lady there, after hearing what was said at our Mundesley Bible Conference about our new work. She writes: "We shall welcome the English church out here, and I hope many earnest workers will come out, for my Church has not sent of its best, nor enough, and its worst side is largely seen in every town." But I appeal even from that letter written by a devout Roman Catholic in Brazil itself. I appeal to Pope Leo XIII, and I shall ask you to remember that nothing I have said, nothing any of us has said, as we are attempting to draw the attention of Christian people to this country, is stronger than this. In his encyclical on the point these words occur:

In every diocese ecclesiastics break all bounds and deliver themselves up to manifold forms of sensuality, and no voice is lifted up imperiously to summon pastors to their duties. The clerical press casts aside all sense of decency and loyalty in its attacks on those who differ, and lacks controlling authority to bring it to its proper use. There is assassination and calumny, the civil laws are defied, bread is denied the enemies of the Church, and there is no one to interpose. ...

It is sad to reflect that prelates, priests, and other clergy are never found doing service among the poor; they are never in the hospital or lazar house, never in the orphan asylum or hospice, in the dwellings of the afflicted or distressed, or engaged in works of beneficence, aiding primary instruction, or found in refuges or prisons. … As a rule, they are ever absent where human misery exists, unless paid as chaplains or a fee is given. On the other hand, you (the clergy) are always to be found in the houses of the rich, or wherever gluttony may be indulged in, wherever the choicest wines may be freely obtained.

No words we have uttered are severer in their condemnation of the Roman clergy in South America than those words written by Pope Leo XIII in order to call to book the clergy because of their failure in that country. The reasons why we should carry to these Latin people the gospel of our Lord and Master as it is found in the New Testament have been set forth by Dr. Robert Speer cogently and forcefully In paper which appeared in The Missionary Review of the Word for March, 1911, entitled, "The Case for Missions in Latin America." From the reasons which he gives us justifying our work as Protestants I shall select three, and I shall give you them in his own words rather than in my own, for they state the case so clearly that they cannot be improved upon. He says:

Protestant missions are justified and demanded in South America by the character of the Roman Catholic priesthood. I fought as long as possible against accepting the opinion universally held throughout South America regarding the priests. Ever since reading as a boy The Life of Charles Kingsley, the celibacy of the priesthood had seemed to me a monstrous and wicked theory, but I had believed that the men who took that vow were true to it, and that while the Church lost by it irreparably, and infinitely more than she gained, she did gain, nevertheless, a pure and devoted, if narrow and impoverished, service. But the deadly evidence spread out all over South America, confronting one in every district to which he goes, evidence legally convincing, morally sickening, proves to him that, whatever may be the case in other lands, in South America the stream of the Church is polluted at its fountains. ...

"Protestant missions in South America are justified because the Roman Catholic Church has not given the people Christianity. There are surely some who find peace and comfort, and some who see Christ through all that hides Him and misrepresents Him, but the testimony of the most temperate and open-minded of the men and women who were once themselves earnest Roman Catholics is that there are few whom they know in the Roman Catholic Church who know the facts of Christ's life, and fewer still who know Christ. The crucifixes, of which South America is full, inadequately represent the gospel. They show a dead man, not a living Saviour. We did not see in all the churches we visited a single symbol or suggestion of the resurrection or the ascension. There were hundreds of paintings of saints and of the Holy Family, and of Mary, but not one of the supreme event in Christianity. And even the dead Christ is the subordinate figure. The central place is Mary's. Often she is shown holding a small lacerated figure in her lap, and often she is the only person represented at all. In the great La Merced church in Lima, over the chancel is the motto: Gloria a Maria. In the oldest church in Barranquilla there is no figure of Christ at all in the altar equipment, but Mary without the infant in the center, two other figures on either side, and over all Gloria a Maria. In the wall of the ancient Jesuit Church in Cuzco, known as the Church of the Campania, are cut the words, 'Come unto Mary, all ye who are burdened and weary with your sins, and she will give you rest.' There are many, I am sure, who learn to love and reverence the name of Christ, but Christ as a living moral and spiritual power the South American religion does not proclaim.

… Protestant missions are justified in South America, because the Roman Catholic Church is at the same time so strong and so weak there. There priesthood has a powerful hold upon the superstition of the people. As we rode along one day in Brazil, with bare heads and rubber ponchos, an old woman came running solicitously from her hovel, mistaking us for priests, and crying, 'Oh, most powerful God, where is your hat?' To the people the priest stands in the place of God, and even where his own life is vile, the people distinguish between his function as priest in which he stands as God before the altar, and his life as man, in which he falls into the frailties of the flesh. Not only is the priest-hood the most influential body in South America, but the Church has a hold upon politics and family life and society which is paralyzing. Its evil is not weak and harmless, but pervasive and deadly, and the Christian Church is called by the most mandatory sanctions to deal with the situation. But, on the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church does not have a fraction of the strength and power in South America which we had supposed it had, and the inefficiency of its work is pitiful. With enormous resources, with all the lines of power in its hands, it has steadily lost ground. The churches, save on festivals, are mostly ill-attended. The priests are derided and reviled. The leading newspaper in Chile, which bitterly attacked some statement which I made upon returning, about the character of the priests, a few weeks later printed a denunciation of the priests in Northern Chile far more sweeping than anything I had said. The comic papers gibe at them. This spectacle of a continent of men losing all respect for religion and leaving it to women, and to priests whose moral character they deride, is a grave and distressing spectacle. There is no sadder sight to be found in the whole world.

I maintain that if nothing more be said, that threefold indictment of the Roman Church in South America as failing to give the people Christianity, and yet as presenting something to them in the name of Christianity so as now to create in the minds of thinking men a revolt from Christianity, is a supreme and overwhelming reason why we should take to them the gospel of that vision of God which came to men in Christ. The author of Ecce Homo, when speaking of the Pharisees, said: "If a divine revelation be the greatest of blessings, then the imposture that counterfeits it must be the greatest of all evils." Or, in the words of the Lord: "If … the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness.

I solemnly indict the Church of Rome for misrepresentation of Christianity in Latin America. When I am charged with ignorance of history, my appeal is to history. When I am charged with not being familiar with the facts, my appeal is to the facts that are patent to all who look and see. No stronger appeal for evangelization is coming from any quarter of the world than from South America.

In the building of nations - if you will suffer me to use a figure the force of which will be perhaps more patent to many of you than to the preacher - the true method is that of reinforced concrete. What is concrete? In case I should manifest my ignorance, I quote from the dictionary, "a compact mass of gravel, coarse pebbles, or stone chippings cemented together by hydraulic or other mortar." (According to Webster's Dictionary, concrete is "artificial stone made by mixing cement and sand with gravel, broken stone, or other aggregate. The materials are mixed with sufficient water to cause the cement to set and bind the entire mass.") What is reinforced concrete? The phrase gripped me when I first heard it, and one day, sitting with my friend Mr. Charles Hay Walker in his study, I asked him what it was. He probably knows as much about reinforced concrete as most men, and he explained that reinforced concrete is that method of building in which metal and concrete are used. The metal prevents the concrete crumbling; the concrete prevents the metal buckling.

Nations must be built with reinforced concrete. The concrete of South America is its intellectual development, and all that means, of political emancipation and commercial advantage. But it must have the strong metal of religion. Where there is no vision of God, the concrete goes to pieces. Though you weld it with hydraulic mortar, the wash of the waves and the pressure of burdens will make it sag. Unless the Church of Christ that has seen the vision carries it to South America, then God alone knows the disaster that must sweep on those countries in the days to come.

There is only one appeal I can make to you as my eyes to that great continent, and I shall make it best in the words of one of the greatest missionary hymns ever written:

Shall we, whose souls are lighted

With wisdom from on high

Shall we, to men benighted,

The Lamp of life deny?

Salvation! Oh, Salvation!

The joyful sound proclaim,

Till earth's remotest nation

Has learned Messiah's name.

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