**VOLUME 7; CHAPTER 08 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE PATHWAY TO POWER by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Then came to Him the mother of the sons of Zebedee with her sons, worshipping, and asking a certain thing of Him. And He said unto her, What wouldest thou? She saith unto Him, Command that these my two sons may sit, one on Thy right hand, and one on Thy left hand in Thy Kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to drink? They say unto Him, We are able. He saith unto them, My cup indeed ye shall drink: but to sit on My right hand, and on My left hand, is not Mine to give but for whom it has been prepared of My Father.*

*Matthew 20:20-23*

THE FIRST WORD OF THE PARAGRAPH DIRECTS ATTENTION TO what has preceded it. "Then came to Him the mother of the sons of Zebedee with her sons, worshipping, and asking ..." When?

The face of the King was set toward Jerusalem. Between the disciples and Himself the relationship was strained. Mark supplies these words in the narrative, "They were in the way, going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus was going before them: and they were amazed; and they that followed were afraid." That is a graphic description of the condition of affairs. Our Lord, with His face set toward Jerusalem, was going alone; the disciples, who had been His close companions during the years of public ministry, were following a little way behind Him, amazed, as our word has it, dazed, as the actual word suggests; they were filled with a sense of coming calamity, and utterly unable to understand what He meant by His perpetual references to a cross, and His persistent setting of His face toward the city that was hostile to him.

During that period He took them apart especially, and repeated His statements as to what lay before Him with even more detail than before concerning His sufferings, in the most remarkable way foretelling the actual indignities to which He was about to be subjected: "They shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him unto the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify." "Then came the mother of the sons of Zebedee with her sons, worshipping, and asking" that James and John might sit the one on the right hand and the other on the left when He came into His Kingdom.

Observe the simple facts of the story. Salome spoke for her sons. When the Lord began to deal with the request, He addressed the sons, not the mother. That is indicated by the fact that He employed the plural pronoun, "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" And it was the sons who answered, "We are able."

James and John He had surnamed Boanerges, sons of thunder; and it is important that we recognize the fact that when our Lord so surnamed these men, He was not describing them as they were, but as they should be. We have only the story of the surnaming in one connection; it is Mark who tells it, and he does so in close connection with another fact. In giving the names of the twelve whom He appointed to apostleship, he wrote, "Simon He surnamed Peter; … James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James, He surnamed Boanerges." In each case the surnaming was prophecy, an indication, not of what the men were as He found them, but of what they should become as the result of His dealing with them. That is quite clearly evident in the wonderful story of Simon, the elemental, restless man of great human forces but lacking the cohesive principle which welds them into rock. Jesus looked into his eyes when He first met Simon and said, "Thou art Simon … thou shalt be called Rock." He surnamed him according to what he should become. So also when He met these two brothers, or when He appointed them to the work of the apostleship, He surnamed them Boanerges. When He first looked into the eyes of Simon, He did not say, Thou art Rock, but Thou shalt become Rock. When He first looked into the eyes of James and John, He did not say of them, Behold two sons of thunder; but Behold two men who shall become sons of thunder. He surnamed them prophetically.

It is true that He surnamed them according to the capacities He saw in them, when those capacities should be fulfilled under His own ministry. He saw in Peter all the elements which, mastered by principle, should become rock. What Simon lacked when he first met the Lord was not any element of strength, but the master principle which should weld all the elements into strength. When He looked at James and John, James, of whom we know so little, and John, with the mystic, far-away look, John, who, looking at you, seemed to see not you but something infinitely beyond you; John the man whose eyes looked languorous with very weariness of things material, yet in whose eyes there lay the slumbering fires of infinite vision - these men, said Jesus, shall be Boanerges, sons of thunder. The word was Aramaic, and was intended to convey to Hebrew minds Hebrew conceptions. We must interpret the practical values by the poetic suggestions. If we take the word Boanerges to pieces we discover that the word for sons is the word which refers to the son as the builder of the family, as the one who continues its values and influences. Quite a different word from the word bar was this word ben, referring to the son as the one who received an inheritance of responsibility and transferred it. Thunder was always symbolic of power and authority. It is an interesting fact that in the Old Testament the word is almost exclusively employed to express something of the authority, power, and majesty of God.

Jesus looked at James and John and said, These shall become Boanerges, sons of thunder, offspring of the Divine majesty and authority, men who shall realize it and repeat it. These were the men who preferred the request.

Quite simply, that request was that when He comes into His Kingdom they might occupy positions of power in association with Him. Our Lord immediately challenged them, "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" With equal readiness, and with remarkable immediateness they responded, "We are able." What, then? Mark it well: Jesus said, "My cup indeed ye shall drink: but to sit on My right hand, and on My left, is not mine to give except to those for whom it hath been prepared."

I need not tarry long to defend my change of the word "but" at that point; this Greek word alla, neuter plural of the word allos means contrariwise. You will find it in the New Testament translated by many words: and, but, even, howbeit, indeed, nay, nevertheless, no, notwithstanding, save, therefore, yea, yet. Twice you will find it in the Authorized Version translated "save"; once that translation is retained in the Revised Version. On the holy mount it is stated, "They saw no one, save Jesus only." Because this passage has been misunderstood, I use the word "except," which is equivalent to "save." Our Lord did not say it was not His to appoint to positions of power in the Kingdom. What He did say was that it was not His to appoint to positions of power any except those for whom the positions were prepared, and the positions are prepared for the men who are prepared for the positions.

The values of this story are persistent. General and hasty condemnation of James and John is very unwise. It is also futile, because in the moment of our highest spiritual aspiration and experience we share their ambition. However much we may condemn them, however much a superficial reading of the narrative may lead us to say they had no right to ask, however much we may be in sympathy with the other ten as they were moved with indignation against the two, in hours when spiritual life is rising to highest levels there is the desire for power and position, and we cry out that we also may sit on His right hand and on His left in His Kingdom, that there may be fulfilled in us also the prophecy that He whispered in our ear when in some holy hour of secret communion He declared that we should become sons of thunder. That was their request.

Let us endeavor to understand these men and our Lord's dealing with them. These, then, are the simple divisions of our meditation: first, the request of the sons of thunder; second, the answer of the Son of God.

The request of the sons of thunder was for places of power. It was, if you like to make use of the word, a selfish request; but it was a desire for self-realization in relation to their Lord. "Command that these my two sons may sit, one on thy right hand, and one on Thy left hand, in Thy Kingdom."

It is to be noted that when presently He dealt with the contrast between the rule and authority in His Kingdom and the rule and authority in the Gentile world, it was in answer to the indignation of the ten. He was not correcting James and John; He was correcting the ten who were angry with James and John. There was far more unadulterated selfishness in the ten in that hour than there was in James and John. I repeat, in some senses the request was selfish, but it was an expression of a desire for self-realization in relation to the Lord; it was in His Kingdom that they desired to occupy these places. As I have pondered the story I have come to the conviction that what they really meant was this: Oh, Master, Thou Who didst surname us Boanerges, fulfil the promise, make us Boanerges, true sons of thunder, men of authority, under Thee in Thy Kingdom, and over the affairs thereof.

Let us look at this a little more particularly, for in an understanding of it is the supreme value of our meditation. Observe, in the first place, that the request was founded on faith; in the second place, that it was conceived in ignorance, and ignorance is not sin save where it is persistent, wilful; in the third place, that it was expressed in magnificent heroism.

I say, in the first place the request was founded on faith. Then, when His face was toward Jerusalem, and He was persistently declaring to them that He was going to suffer and be killed, then they asked that they might sit on His right hand and on His left in His Kingdom. The request was founded on faith, the faith that He was King; on the conviction that was mightier than all their trembling, that He was coming, somehow, into His Kingdom. They were amazed, dazed, filled with fear; yet had they not seen Him, had they not tabernacled with Him, had they not listened to His words, had they not caught some glimpses of the high ideals of His heart? They were convinced that it was absolutely necessary, that, somehow, He would enter into His Kingdom. So, in spite of the threatening Cross, it may be that they were attempting to banish it from their minds, that out of some sort of compassion for Him they were trying to make Him forget it for the moment - it may have been for one, or both, of these reasons that they avowed confidence in the Kingdom and in Him as King. It was a request founded on faith.

It was also a request conceived in ignorance. They did not know Him. Verily, they had seen Him, they had listened to Him; but they did not know Him. They never knew Him until He was dead, buried, risen, and ascended! In one sudden rush of new life and light they knew Him in the Pentecostal baptism. They did not know Him when they made this request. They were ignorant of all the profoundest truths concerning Him. Neither did they know His Kingdom, they were still thinking within the realm of the material concerning the Kingdom. They were still thinking, in common with others of their nation, and in common with all the disciples, that He was about to set up an earthly kingdom with material benefits, with all the blessings of this life for humanity.

And they were not wholly wrong. That is another subject, yet I am bound to touch on it in passing. There are men to-day who seem to imagine that our Lord is not set on that kind of kingdom. But He is, and He will never be satisfied until the last wrong is righted, the last tear is wiped away, and humanity finds itself in a true brotherhood in relation to the Fatherhood of God. The King will never be satisfied while wrong persists, He will never rest until He reigns in this world, until

The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;

The world, and they that dwell therein;

and until the Kingdom is established in this world the King will never have finished His work.

But These men were only looking for the material; they had not discovered that truth which we are still slow to believe, that the material can be realized only through the spiritual. We shall never set up a true social order save as the men composing it are regenerate, renewed, remade within themselves. These men had not seen that the Lord's first work is spiritual, that He can proceed to His Kingdom only by the use of weapons, not carnal weapons, but spiritual. When they preferred their request their vision of Him was limited, their understanding of His Kingdom was imperfect. Moreover, their request was conceived in ignorance of what it involved, they had not realized what it would mean to them if ever they were to realize this character of authority. They did not understand what their request excluded. If He should give them these places of authority they would lack exactly that kind of authority of which they had been so constantly thinking. It was a request conceived in ignorance, but ignorance is not sin.

Once again, it was a request expressed in heroism. I listen to the story once more and I hear our Lord as He said to these men, "Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" And then I listen to their reply, "We are able." I know exactly what we have so often said; It was a foolish word! Yes, perhaps it was. Yet think again. What did it mean? "We are able." They meant to say, The purpose that inspires us makes us entirely reckless of possible consequences! It was exactly the spirit which actuated Peter when he said, Why cannot I follow Thee now? I will die for Thee! With our cool, calculating, cynical habits of mind, we have criticized Peter for his foolhardiness. What did our Lord say to him? You shall follow Me; that profound passion that is ready to risk death shall be fulfilled in spite of the fact that within a few hours you will deny Me! It was exactly the kind of passion our Lord was ever seeking, reckless disregard of cost in answer to a driving impulse of purpose. When we declare that Jesus called men to count the cost before they followed Him we are saying what is not warranted by any story in the New Testament. He never came to men and charged them to count the cost. He came to men telling them to follow at any cost, at all costs, without counting cost. I know there was one occasion when He said to men, What man of you if he is going to build a tower would not first count the cost; or what king going to war will not first count the cost? But the context shows that neither the man going to build nor the king going to war is the disciple, but the Lord. He was not teaching men that they must count the cost, but that He must count the cost, and therefore His terms must be severe. The severity of His terms was marked. If men will follow Him it must be regardless of cost. That man who sits down and quietly counts the cost of becoming a follower of Christ will never follow Christ. The only man who really follows Christ is the man who says, I am able, whatever the cup may be. It may be true in some sense that he is not able; but the venture of his faith, the heroisrn that dares, the passionate abandonment of himself to high enterprise, that is what the Lord is ever seeking. When a man says, I am able, in that spirit, even though he is not able, he will be able before the Lord has done with him. Let there be that heroic abandonment of everything, refusal to count the cost, that says, I am able; then the Lord will immediately look into the eyes of that man and say, You shall!

So we touch immediately on the response of the Son of God. Observe with great care, speaking generally of the response of Jesus to this word of James and John, that there was in it not a single touch of anger, not a single note of scorn. Let me emphasize that, I think if I had dealt with James and John (and that is the word, dealt with them - how fond we are of dealing with people) I would have shown them the unutterable folly of their request. I would have shown them their amazing stupidity. But there was no touch of anger, no suspicion of scorn, in the answer of the Lord. Let me very carefully illuminate this story by an earlier one. There was an occasion when Jesus answered in anger, when He answered, as it seems to me, with a touch of scorn. There was a moment when He said, "Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art a stumbling block unto Me." That was when a man said in the presence of the Cross, Not that, not the Cross. But to these men who in answer to His question, "Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" said, "We are able," there was no such rebuke. His anger was for the man who was not prepared to follow along the shadowed, mysterious way of the Cross. There is no anger toward these men. These men were very foolish! Yes, that is what you said about that girl who desired to leave her home and go to the foreign mission field where the climate was likely to kill her. It is exactly the same thing. When the soul faces heroically the drinking of the cup in comradeship with the suffering of the Son of God, even though that soul does not understand all it is doing, the high resolve, the noble purpose, the fine abandonment, hear from the King only an answer of great tenderness.

Then I pray you observe how the Son of God responded. He revealed their ignorance, He honored their heroism, and He indicated the line of their responsibility. He revealed their ignorance by the declaration, "Ye know not what ye ask." That was not a rebuke, it was a statement. Then He helped them to understand what they were asking, and He did it by illustration. He brought them back to the beginning, "Are ye able to drink the cup?" He recalled them to His previous teaching, when He told them that He must go to Jerusalem and that there He must suffer and be killed and that He must be raised again, that He Himself was to become a son of thunder through suffering, death, and resurrection. So He revealed their ignorance to them.

Then they replied, "We are able," and He immediately honored their heroism, He admitted them to the fellowship of His sufferings - "My cup indeed ye shall drink." I am well aware that there are senses in which they never drank His cup, there are senses in which He drank the cup of unutterable, unfathomable sorrow alone; but it is equally true - and the New Testament is full of it, the epistles reveal it and teach it - that He did, and He does, admit those who follow Him to some share in His sufferings: "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings," … "fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ." These are the words of a man who came to understand his Lord and who was wonderfully admitted into fellowship in the travail that makes the Kingdom come. So our Lord said to these men, "My cup indeed ye shall drink." How verily they did! For one of them it was swift, sudden martyrdom by Herod's sword. For the other, "I, John your brother in the long, lonely exile in Patmos: affliction." Yea, verily, they drank of His cup.

But in that moment when He admitted them to fellowship with His suffering He admitted them also to the triumph of His glory. When in response to His challenge they said they were able to drink of the cup of His sufferings, the cup that was even then being pressed to His holy lips, in that moment He admitted them to resources of power, vision, virtue, victory. Then He admitted them to the forces that would make them sons of thunder, men of power, men of authority in the spiritual Kingdom.

He not only revealed their ignorance and honored their heroism, He indicated their responsibility. First by suggestion as He talked to them; and then by interpretation as He talked to the ten.

By suggestion; "My cup indeed ye shall drink: but to sit on My right hand, and on My left hand, is not Mine to give, but for whom it hath been prepared of My Father." Thus He suggested that the places are for those for whom they are prepared; and He confronted them with the cup, and left them uncertain about the positions of power; confronted them with the travail, and uttered no final word as to how they should be prepared for prominent places of power and position in His Kingdom, save only that He told them these were prepared by the Father.

The ten were indignant, and made their protest; and Jesus called them to Him, and interpreted the suggestion He had made to the two as He contrasted authority in the Gentile kingdom and authority in His own Kingdom. The perpetual law of power in the Kingdom is that of disrobing, stooping, bending, serving. The man who stoops the lowest rises the highest. That was Jesus' final word.

Of all this wonderful incident the ultimate is found in the words with which our Lord ended His instruction to the ten, those great, wonderful words that have in them so much of music, so much of the thunder of mystic power, that I hardly need do other than read them: "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Lord, suffer us to sit, one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left hand in Thy Kingdom. Yes, the Son of Man is coming into a Kingdom; but He will enter into His Kingdom, not by compelling men to serve Him, but by stooping to serve men. How near to the Kingdom of God are we in the Church? How near are we in our theologies to an understanding of this strange, wonderful law of the Kingdom of God? Are we not yet thinking and preaching as though our Lord is demanding service from men? He says, No, "the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." Change the words, simple as they are, and use simpler ones. The Son of Man came, not to compel men to serve Him, but to serve them. This is His way to His Kingdom. Not by enlisting recruits, but by Himself enlisting to serve, is this Son of Man coming into His Kingdom. That is a strange and puzzling thing to human nature. That troubled John the Baptist and made him send the question, "Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?" What art Thou doing? Gathering no army, consulting no committees, prosecuting no great propaganda! What art Thou doing? Walking about, serving people, binding up the broken-hearted, going to a village to help a suffering soul, spending long hours talking to one man! What was He doing? Serving. "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." Let James and John, the ten, the twelve, the whole Church, hear this: His way into the Kingdom is the way of service, and service that shall crown itself in sacrifice; He is crowned by life, not preserved, but given as a ransom for many.

So with His followers. The disciples of supreme power are those of the lowliest service, I go back a little to look at James and John. Our Lord was on His way to Jerusalem, and going through a Samaritan village He fain would tarry there; but the Samaritans knew that His face was set toward Jerusalem, and they would have none of Him. Then James and John said, Let us call down fire from heaven to consume them! They were not sons of thunder then! They thought they were. So do we still when we curse those in opposition. But later James passed to hidden service, as one of the twelve on whom the Spirit fell, and at last to martyrdom. So he became a son of thunder. John went to Ephesus to write love letters tremulous with Divine affection, saturated with Divine compassion, musical with Divine tenderness; and on to Patmos, brother of all afflicted souls. So he became a son of thunder, a man of power, of authority. They learned the secret of service and of sacrifice through suffering.

The passion for power Jesus does not rebuke. It is a high and noble moment when we look Him in the face and say, Master, make us men of power in fellowship with Thee, let us sit at Thy right hand in the Kingdom, let us be close to Thee in the exercise of authority. It is a high and noble aspiration.

But the way of fulfilment is always the same. You must come with Me, says the Lord, drink this cup, and abandon all your rights; and girding yourselves with humility as with a slave's apron, pour out your lives in serving others. You will be misunderstood; they will smite you on the cheek! You will be misinterpreted; they will spit on you, scourge you, laugh at you, bruise you! But so you will rise to power. All this, the story is saying to me, to my shame. God help us together to catch the vision of the way to power, and help us to consent.