**VOLUME 7; CHAPTER 14 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**GETHSEMANE: THE GARDEN OF SPICES by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Then cometh Jesus with them unto the place called Gethsemane.*

*Matthew 26:36*

IN THE HEBREW ECONOMY, ON THE DAY OF ATONEMENT the High Priest entered the Holiest of all three times. First, he passed within the veil, carrying fire in the golden censer and incense in his hands. There he cast the incense on the fire, and the cloud of it overshadowed the Mercy Seat, and prepared for his ministration, which was about to follow. He entered the second time within the veil, bearing with him the blood of his own sin offering, which he sprinkled on his own behalf. Finally, he entered with the blood of a sin offering for all the people.

When in the fulness of time, and in fulfilment of the ancient and divinely appointed ritual, our High Priest came to the great Day of Atonement, He entered the Holiest of all twice in the exercise of His holy office; once bearing with Him the incense and the fire, once with the sin offering for all the people. He had no second entrance such as Aaron had, because He had no sin offering for Himself. He was "holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners," and so it was on their behalf that He needed to appear.

Venturing thus to borrow the symbolism of the ancient ritual, and to see it being fulfilled in the activities of those final days in the mission of our Lord, it ever seems to me that in Gethsemane's Garden we see Him passing alone within the veil, bearing the fire and the incense, and on Calvary's Cross we see Him entering with the sin offering for all the people.

It was while He hung on the Cross that all ritualism ended and symbolism was forevermore made unnecessary, the last symbol being the destruction of symbol as the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

Last Sunday evening we saw Him delivered up by God's determinate counsel, by Satan's malicious hate, by Mary's tender anointing, by Judas' base treachery. It was a revelation of conflicting co-operation moving towards the sacrifice of the ages. This evening, as God in His gracious goodness and by the solemnizing power of His Holy Spirit shall help us, we go a step further. From that outer court of turmoil we pass through the Holy Place to the awful stillness of the Holiest of all. It behooves us here and at once to confess that these things are too high for us, that they are the secret things which belong unto the Lord, and that no attempted exposition of the letter of this chapter can be a final exposition of all the spiritual activity, of which the letter is but the external symbol. Nevertheless, if the secret things belong unto the Lord, the revealed things are for us, and through them, though we may not wholly apprehend the hidden mysteries, we are brought into touch with them; and so with all reverence of spirit we draw near to Gethsemane and desire to behold, to consider, the High Priest of our confession.

In that ancient ceremony the fire taken from the altar was the symbol of dedication, while the incense of sweet spices beaten very small was the symbol of the graces of character which make one acceptable to God. In that going in of the priest both fire and incense were necessary. The incense must be cast on the fire and consumed, suggesting the fact that the most perfect of humanity must be abandoned to the will of God and find its ultimate use in outpouring itself in order to accomplish the purpose of the Most High. And it ever seems to me when I read the story of Gethsemane that this is exactly what took place in the Garden in the case of our Lord and Master. Here He reached the ultimate hour of His personal dedication.

To change the figure, the infinite music of His life was ever true to the chord of the dominant struck by the psalmist long ere He came: "Lo, I am come; in the roll of the book it is written of Me: I delight to do Thy will, O My God." His first recorded words were these, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" And then on through all the period of His life, in the natural and beautiful days of child- hood, in the growing strength and glory of youth, in the stern years of manhood, in all the difficult pathway of His public teaching, everything was true to that first call. Had we met Him anywhere and asked Him for the deepest reason of the journey He took, or the deed He wrought, or the word He spoke He would ever have answered in the selfsame words, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me." In the process of that life of dedication, He came again and again to the place of trial and testing, and yet with undeviating loyalty and magnificent determination His life was dedicated from first to last to the will of God.

But now in the Garden came the supreme and final test. Here there was presented to Him again that which He had seen from the beginning, the coming of the Cross; and the question arises - not for Him, but for us - will the life so wondrously devoted be complete in devotion in this strange and awful hour?

Ere He passed within the veil to represent sinning men, the High Priest entered Himself in His own right, no longer by an act of symbolism, but by the actuality of a personal experience, carrying the fire and carrying the incense, and on that consuming fire He cast the incense of His own sacrificial and beautiful and perfect life; and the cloud of it overshadowing the Mercy Seat was the prelude of His corning again with blood in behalf of sinning souls.

All this is but figure of speech, all this is but the language of symbolism, but it is only through these things that we can approach such sacred matters. Let us therefore immediately reckon as with ourselves that all the other figures and occurrences on this page of the Gospel are important only as they are connected with the central matter; and let us reverently attempt to observe the graces of our Lord as they were revealed in Gethsemane, the consuming fire, as it was most evidently present; and then that activity, so appalling, so aweinspiring, by which the graces and beauties of the Christ were brought into contact with the consuming fire, and the dedication of His personal life to the will of His God was brought to consummation and to glory.

First, let us observe the graces of the Lord as they are revealed in the story. And immediately we recognize that it is almost impossible to analyze a fragrance. If only I knew how to read that chapter as it should be read comment would be almost unnecessary. But I am always conscious of failure when I try to read such a story, because in my reading you think about Peter and about Judas, and they ought to be almost out of sight for the ineffable and supernal glory of the one central figure of the Christ. And yet they are needed for a revelation of His grace. And if for a little while we may find our way far from our immediate surroundings into that Garden, and somewhere hide ourselves away that we may watch, then we shall see amid the common-places and brutalities of the last hour the glories of Jesus - and I advisedly now use that human name - the graces and the beauties of His character stand out clearly. Then let me speak to you of the things that impress me, prefacing anything I may say by saying this to you. You have seen glories that my eyes have never seen. I can speak only of the things that I see.

As I read the story I am first of all impressed with the majesty of Jesus. I have not carelessly chosen the word "majesty." I earnestly desire that now it may be delivered from all our false and materialistic ideas concerning it. It is derived from the comparative of magnum, "great," and it suggests something beyond mere greatness; it includes within itself the thought of dignity, but not of patronage; of aloofness with which no liberty can be taken in certain senses, but which is always near at hand in the hour of need - Majesty! It suggests what the Psalmist meant when long ago he said, "The Lord reigneth; He is apparelled with majesty"; or what he meant when on another occasion he sang, "The voice of the Lord is full of majesty."

The majesty of Jesus is revealed, first of all, in His knowledge of all the program that lay ahead. He had been in the Upper Room, they had eaten together the ancient Passover, He had instituted the new feast, symbol of the new Covenant; they had joined in singing the great Hallel, and then they had left the Upper Room and walked down across the Kedron toward the shadows of Gethsemane. On the way He told them in language chosen from their own ancient Scriptures exactly what was about to happen, "All ye shall be offended in Me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." He had a perfect knowledge of the way along which He was going, He had an absolute confidence of the issue of that through which He was about to pass, notwithstanding the fact that He was also conscious of all the awfulness of the cup, for He said to those men as He told them of their coming scattering because of the smiting of the shepherd, "After I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee."

I see His majesty finally in His demeanor in the presence of His enemies, for the story as Matthew tells it is not complete, We need all the other stories to see all the details, and to what I have read tonight we must especially add that one wonderful touch which comes to us from the pen of John the Seer: our Lord looking at the men who had come into the Garden to arrest Him, and His words, "Whom seek ye?" They said, "Jesus of Nazareth," And He replied, "I am"! And in a moment they fell backward. It was the flaming glory of the infinite majesty of God, not shining in some spectacular flame, but suddenly focused in the splendor and the dignity of His humanity.

Then I look again, and perhaps more closely, and I am impressed by the revelation of His meekness. And again the word is not lightly used nor lightly chosen. I have little care at the moment for the meaning of our particular word "meek." Rather I am thinking of the word He actually used of Himself when in the midst of His public ministry He said, "I am meek and lowly," that wonderful word which has never been perfectly translated, the word that suggests strength harnessed for service, the meekness that is gentleness. And what is gentleness? It was George Matheson who once said that

"we use false figures when we speak of gentleness. We speak of the gentleness of the brook. The brook has no gentleness, it knows no gentleness. It rushes on its way, and exerts all its force over all the pebbles down the mountain side. If you would know what gentleness is, behold the mighty ocean lulled to rest, the ripples of which kiss the golden sand and bathe the feet of the little child. What it might do! How it might spread rack and ruin. But its strength is held in check for service."

That is meekness. "Thy gentleness," said an ancient singer, "hath made me great." No, behold, I pray you, the meekness of the Man. It is revealed first in His sifting of His disciples. Judas was excluded; then, halting at the very portal of the Garden, Jesus left eight of them behind, and permitted only three to go a little farther with Him because they were better able to make the effort, until at last, knowing that He was about to enter where they could not follow, He left them, charging them to watch with Him, Himself going alone to face the unutterable sorrow. There is a wonderful revelation here of strength. There are hours of unutterable anguish that come to our hearts which we cannot bear without the presence of a friend; and even though we know the sight of our anguish would break the heart of our friend, we must have that friend. At least I am such. But here was One so full of meekness that He would leave them.

Then observe Him dealing with their failure. Mark the patience of His method with them, no angry word from beginning to end. Even when He did rebuke them for sleeping He said, "The spirit indeed is willing." What recognition of their intention, even when He rebuked their fault!

I am impressed still further with the sympathy of Jesus as it is revealed in this story, and again the word is selected, and so far as I am able, with care. What is sympathy? Bearing with another, feeling with another, entering into the experience of the other, and sharing it. That was perhaps most wonderfully manifest at the last. I think it is often missed by readers of the story. I am quite sure it has been missed by commentators and expositors over and over again. "Then cometh He to the disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." Some expositors have declared that when He said "Sleep on now, and take your rest," He spoke satirically to them because they were asleep, What misunderstanding of the Lord! No, you need more than the colon of the Revised Version to read this story correctly. You need a period, indicating a pause, a halt. Not satirically, but definitely and of infinite patience, and out of the fulness of His sympathy He said to them, as starting from their slumber at His return they looked at Him, "Sleep on now and take your rest." How long a time passed I cannot tell, but it was some period ere He woke them with the words, "Behold, the hour is at hand. Arise, let us be going." Jesus waited for them while they slept, watching over them. He knew all that was waiting for them on the coming day, all that through which they soon must pass of base denial, of flight, of terror; and so He, the supreme Saviour, watched the men who could not watch, sat by them in infinite sympathy as they slept. That sympathy was revealed again in something not recorded by Matthew, how when, in blundering zeal Peter wounded Malchus, with quick sensitiveness our Lord felt all the anguish of the pain, and with a touch, the last act of His divine surgery, healed the ear of Malchus.

And yet all these are but characteristics. There is yet something profounder, deeper, in which all these find their place, His compassion; not His pity merely, not merely the sympathy on which we have been touching, but that profounder, deeper fact, unfathomable as God, His compassion. It is found everywhere, for compassion was the secret of His being in the Garden at all. As we attempted to show in our meditation on His own great word, "The Son of Man is delivered up," no arresting hand of man apprehended Him. Observe how with kindly and gracious irony He spoke to the men at the close of the scene, "Are ye come out as against a robber with swords and staves to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching, and ye took me not," which means, Ye could not take Me, could not arrest Me, till Mine hour was come. And now do you imagine that with swords and staves you will accomplish it? Nay! "All this is come to pass, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled"! The reason of His being there was not that they had trapped Him, but that His compassion had compelled Him.

And so finally, and it is a thing that must be added - yet there are senses in which it seems almost irreverent to add it, so patent is it - I am impressed with His awful purity and sinlessness. That was the strength of everything else. It was the reason of His majesty, it was the strength of all His meekness, it created the keenness of His sympathy, and it was the inspiration of His compassion. And I will now repeat what I have said before. Incense!

I go back to the ancient economy, for I am also a child, and I must have my pictures and my helps when I stand in the presence of such things as these. I find in the ancient economy that the incense was compounded of sweet spices. What they were none can tell us finally. They are written for us on the pages of our Bible: onycha, stacte, galbanum, frankincense, and salt. It was a wonderful compound. What was this onycha? We do not know, and may at once confess it. All the clue we have is that of the Hebrew word which comes from a root that signifies the lion, the symbol of kingliness and dignity. I would lay no undue emphasis on that, but it is the only clue we have. Stacte was a highly fragrant gum, most certainly a type and symbol among these Eastern people of gentleness, of grace, of beauty. Galbanum was a product produced from a plant by bruising it, and was typical always of sympathy. Frankincense was the type of the priestly office. Salt was the element of purity. Whatever these men of the ancient time saw in their incense, looking back at it through the light of the glory of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we see suggestiveness in that incense of sweet spices compounded together, and permeated by the salt that purified. And let us ever remember that in that ancient economy men were forbidden to use this compound for personal gratification. It was sanctified, it was holy to the Lord.

I behold in that Garden One Whose garments smell of myrrh and cassia and aloes out of king's palaces, One Whose character is full of all gracious fragrance. It is Himself Who is the glory of the scene, the supreme beauty, the altogether lovely One, the well-beloved of the Father, always well pleasing to Him.

And now we turn to the symbolism of the fire. It was the symbol of the purpose of God, of the will of God; and the purpose of God and the will of God are the outcome of the nature of God. How shall I tell the story of the nature of God invisible and infinite? I will tell it thus. "God is love"! "Our God is a consuming fire"! These are not two facts but one, two statements of one essential truth. Mingling in the fire are the qualities of holiness and righteousness, and merging in the fire are the qualities of compassion and of mercy. Holiness and righteousness and mercy and compassion, all proceed out of the infinite mystery of His nature. Now these essential facts of the Deity of God reveal to us the secret of everything in this Man of His right hand; they discover the reason of the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, in answer to which He trod the sorrowful pathway to the Cross, and finally reached the Cross itself.

Mark His references to the fact. The first is discovered in His quotation of the ancient prophecy, "I will smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered." The actual words occur in that final burden of Zechariah's prophecy: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts; smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones." Whatever we may think that meant, Jesus quoted it and applied it to Himself, and gave the fact of that writing as the reason impelling Him on that onward pathway. So also, when at last He awoke the sleeping disciples, mark the word He uttered, "The hour is come." At your leisure take your Gospels, and see how that figure of speech ran through His conversation, and observe how constantly on the pathway to the Cross He said, "Mine hour is not yet come." At last He said, "The hour is come."

He recognized He was in co-operation with God in the fulfilment of eternal purpose. The majesty of the will of God was on His soul. In that last word of the story, when He said if He besought His Father He would send Him twelve legions of angels, I pray you think of the angels He refused, and then inquire why did He not ask for them. The answer is found in His own words, "How then should the Scriptures be fulfilled?" The recognition of the fact that He was in co-operation with God, not working against Him - God was not working against His Son, and His Son was not working against God - God was always with Him. The zeal of God's house consumed Him. The fire was the will of God.

And so we reach, for a few brief moments tarrying in the inner place, that paragraph of inward anguish thrilling with power, on which, it seems to me that the cloud of the incense ever rests, so that the final word can never be said concerning it. You will notice in the story that three times over He cast His incense on the fire. He took all of Himself, and abandoned it in devotion to the will of His God. Mark the prelude to His first activity. He said to His disciples, "My soul," My life, "is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." My life, My soul, all that I am. The things that we have been trying to look at! All the graces of Christ to which I have made reference were for joy and not for sorrow; they were the things that make for joy, they were the things of joy unspeakable, and full of glory. Yet He said, This life of Mine, into which no sorrow ought to come by reason of what it is in itself, is exceeding sorrowful, for all the things that are things of joy are contradicted. My authority is set at nought, my majesty is mocked, my meekness is refused, my sympathy is answered with scourging and with spitting; all the frankincense of my profound compassion is being trodden underfoot, and my purity is hurt and offended by the awful pollutions through the midst of which I pass. And He was called to that experience, called to endure it.

And now behold Him within the veil in the presence of God, alone with God; the sense of the coming sorrow surging through and through Him: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." This is but a revelation of the keen sense of the impending sorrows. But now behold: the priest casts the incense on the fire! "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt"; if this be Thy will, I consent to the bruising of My life, that the things which should make for all joy should experience all sorrow. So the incense was cast on the fire.

Passing back, He found the sleeping disciples. And I pray you mark the infinite beauty of His recognition of their willingness to keep awake. "The spirit indeed is willing." Then He passed again into the Presence. And now the wording is slightly changed, and I see not merely the sense of the coming sorrows, but the sense of their inevitability. If it be not possible that this cup shall pass - then the incense of all His perfect life was flung upon the fire - "not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

Again glancing toward the disciples sleeping there, in infinite pity He allowed them to sleep on without disturbing them, and once more returning into the Presence He said the same words.

We do not read this story aright if we tarry over the words that indicate the appalling sense of coming sorrow. They did but serve as prelude to the final, utter, absolute devotion of Himself to the will of God.

As our High Priest is seen standing in the Holy Place and casting the fragrant incense of His life on the consuming fire, behold a cloud covers the Mercy Seat!

So I glance back once more at the book of Leviticus, and I read, "I will appear in the cloud upon the Mercy Seat which is upon the ark; that ye die not." A few verses further on I read that this incense was to be brought and burned on the fire in order that the cloud of the incense might cover the Mercy Seat on the testimony that the offering priest might not die.

Whatever that may have meant for Aaron in those early days, and for subsequent High Priests, I turn to the letter to the Hebrews, and I read, "Who in the days of His flesh, having offered up prayers and supplication with strong crying and tears unto Him Who was able to save Him from death, and having been heard for His godly fear." He was heard, He was answered, He was saved from death. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death," He stood for a moment so overwhelmed by sorrows in His humanity that it seemed as if they must kill Him. He had said, "No man taketh my life from me. I lay it down, and I will take it again." In order to have a second entrance to the Holy Place with atoning blood there must be a dying in act, not by the ordinary pathway of humanity, but by the authority, and for the purpose of a great compassion. Thus in the hour of His praying our Lord was delivered from death that threatened Him, which was the mere death of crushing sorrow. So He offered the incense, devoted Himself to the ultimate in the economy of the purpose of God, and was heard in that He cried. He did not die in the Garden, but moved from there to the Cross itself.

By that triumph, says the writer of the letter, He became the author of eternal salvation. And presently passing in again to the Holy Place, He prevailed, and men are made nigh.

I pray you, believe me, this is not the final word, these are only some of the things of the glory of that Garden scene. May He, in His compassion, Who was patient with sleeping disciples, and full of majesty and of meekness in that unutterable hour, cleanse the words and thoughts of our attempted exposition, and may He bring us nearer and nearer yet to the heart of His sorrow.