**VOLUME 7; CHAPTER 16 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**HALTING by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow Him.*

*1 Kings 18:21*

AHAB WAS KING OF ISRAEL. THE KINGDOM WAS IN A MOST deplorable condition, perhaps at a period darker than any other in its history. Ahab was a veritable incarnation of evil, and his influence, together with that of Jezebel, had been blighting and spoiling everything of essential greatness. Clouds and darkness were over all the land. Images of Baal and Ashtaroth gleamed in the valleys. Temples of idolatry were erected everywhere, and the altars of God were broken down. Then, while such darkness reigned throughout the land, while it seemed as though no cheering star gleamed through the blackness, as suddenly as the falling of a thunder-bolt, there appeared on the scene one of the most remarkable and fiery of all the prophets.

In the previous chapter we have the beginning of the story of the mission of Elijah. "And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the sojourners of Gilead, said unto Ahab." That is the introduction of this man. We know no more of him than this, a Tishbite, and we are not sure even until this day what that may mean. It is even suggested that he was a man of another nationality, not of the chosen seed. Be that as it may, from somewhere, no one knows where, somehow, under what influence none can tell, this man broke in upon the condition of affairs with a message that was fiery and forceful, terrific and timely, a veritable message of God, a message that was brief, a message that was a message of judgment, a message that made no apology, and offered no conditions, and suggested no compromise.

It was briefly this: "As the Lord, the God of Israel liveth, before Whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word," and, having uttered it, Elijah vanished.

But the Word of the Lord, which is ever powerful, which is never void, but ever thrills with energy, wrought out into actual and terrific fulfilment, the word of judgment, that there should be no rain and no dew for three years, and the people who, in material prosperity, had forgotten God - no, infinitely worse, had defiantly rebelled against God - were brought back face to face with God through the process of a judgment which had been foretold by the prophet. Elijah was cared for, first, at the brook, and then at Zarephath, until the time foretold having passed away he appeared again on the scene, first to Obadiah, and then to Ahab.

Our story is that of the hour in which Elijah faced Ahab. It is a wonderful story, dramatic and startling. Ahab, at last, stood face to face with the man whose prediction, having been fulfilled, had wrought such havoc in the condition of the nation. He asked him, "Is it thou, thou troubler of Israel?" And with quiet, calm dignity the answer of the prophet was given, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed the Baalim." And then addressing himself still to the king, in the language of a superior, with the note of authority, he said, "Gather to me all Israel ... and the prophets of Baal." The king, who, in his first words, manifested the anger that was in his heart, and the murder that lurked there, made no difficulty, but, under the tremendous power and will of the prophetic command, backed by the authority of God, gathered the people together.

The story is better written than I can ever tell it. All I stay to do for one moment is to notice the different classes that were gathered on Mount Carmel in that wonderful moment in the history of the people. On the one hand were the prophets of Baal, four hundred and fifty; and the prophets of the Asherah, four hundred; and all those who followed their teaching and worshiped at their shrines. On the other hand, stood the one lonely messenger of God, Elijah, confronting the prophets of a false religion, confronting the corruption of a corrupt court, confronting that most terrible of all things, an undecided mob. On the one hand, men who are decided in their worship of Baal; on the other, a man who is decided in his worship of Jehovah; and then that great company of the nation, waiting for leading, undecided, a mixed multitude, many of them never having confessed openly their allegiance to God, even though in their heart they were loyal to Him, for while Elijah said "I, even I only, am left," elsewhere we are told that God replied, "Yet will I leave Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." And beside that seven thousand, the great multitude of the people who knew the will of God, who had been nurtured in the very atmosphere and enforcement of His law, but into whose heart there had come the lusting that is at the base of all false worship - a great crowd, undecided, uncommitted, halting, wavering, taking neither one side nor the other.

It was to this multitude that Elijah spoke, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" Between opinions, that is, without opinion. A man who is between two opinions is devoid of an opinion. How long halt ye there? said the prophet. Now listen to him. "If God be God, follow Him; if Baal, then follow him." I think I hear the fervor and the passion in the prophet's voice. I think I know how he felt that day. I think, if I may put this old Hebrew and stately language into the language of the present day and the language of my heart, it is as though the prophet said, Take sides at all costs. Let us know where you are by one thing or the other; find your God, and follow. I think I hear the prophet saying, as he looked out on this great crowd, wondering over the discussing and philosophizing and arguing, "If God be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." Build your altar, burn incense, and go the whole way. "If God be God, rebuild His broken altar, and follow Him." It is the prophet's protest against indecision. "How long halt ye between two opinions?"

The times have changed. We do not gather now on Mount Carmel. The prophets of Baal are not among us as they were there. Our altars of God are not the same as were the altars raised of old. All the accidental robing has passed, but essential men are still here. All that is merely Eastern has gone out of the story, but the living vital principles abide. And as God, Who alone is able to do it, sifts and divides among us we fall on different sides and into different positions just as did these men of old. The local coloring has passed away, but the central truth abides. There are those who are definitely and openly and positively worshiping God. Thank God for the company. There are those - alas, that it is so, and yet it is true - who are openly and definitely and positively worshiping at other altars, for every man is worshiping, every man has some deity enshrined in his heart and life. Every man has some master passion of his life to which he burns incense as the days come and go. There are those who are worshiping at the altars of idolatry, at the altars of pollution, at the altars of sin. But there are also very many who are not definitely and positively and avowedly committed either to God or Baal, either to purity or impurity, either to right or to wrong. The choice has not yet been definitely made. They have not yet said, God is God, we will follow Him until we see Him. They have not yet said, Evil is God, we will follow it until we see it unmasked in perdition. They have not said these things. They are standing and halting and waiting between opinions, with opinion unformed, with decision unmade.

"How long halt ye between two opinions?" I make the same appeal as did the prophet of old. "If God be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." If the God Whom I declare to you be indeed the One Who can best fill that place in your heart which clamors to be filled, if He be the One Who can best guide, direct life, enoble you, crown you, follow Him. But if evil can best satisfy you, if you have come to the decision that you can best be fitted and fashioned and formed and satisfied by evil, then follow evil. Only do one thing or the other. In the name of God and humanity, for the sake of God and humanity, take sides, and let us know where you stand. The man who is turning his face toward evil and pollution with all his heart and soul and mind is not doing half so much harm in the community as the man who is taking on his lips for discussion the language of sacred things, while in his heart he refuses to follow them to an issue. That is the kind of statement that some of you resent. I shall repeat it and emphasize it. Here is a man who has given his whole life to the clamant cry for stimulants; here is a man who is a drunkard. That man's influence on the children of the district where he lives is not half so pernicious as the influence of the father of the children who plays with the thing that may damn his child. Think of it. I will take my boy in the freshness of his boyhood's days by the hand, and I will lead him along some street, and there in the gutter lies the man absolutely abandoned to drink, bloated, bruised, and degraded, and my boy looks there at that man, and he is warned. But it may be there lies in the life of my boy some hidden fire, which once ignited, will burn him to ruin, and he sees me indulging, not decided as to whether it is right or wrong; he tries to follow me, and may be ruined. I know that is extreme, but it is true.

You are undecided. You have never come to a definite decision either for God or for evil. There is a man in your store, in your shop, in your place of business, who is "going the whole pace," to quote a phrase with which every man here is familiar. The influence of that man on the other men is not half so pernicious as the influence of the man who discusses and does nothing, affects to believe in the Gospels of the New Testament and never obeys them, speaks patronizingly of God Almighty and of Jesus Christ and in life rebels against God. That is the man who is harming others by his influence, the man who drifts and is not decided, and is willing to discuss, but never to do; to philosophize, but never to surrender; to argue, but never to commit his life to Jesus Christ. Oh, these men and women who are uncommitted, these men and women in our churches and our pews and in our services who come and go, drifting, drifting, until they block the river way and hinder others. In the name of God, I appeal to you, do one thing or the other. If God be God, follow Him. If evil be the true master of life, follow it. Let us have the line of cleavage clearly defined.

If you want to form your decision and cease your halting, if you want to decide whether it is to be Baal or God, sin or Jesus Christ, come back for a few moments and look at the picture in the chapter in which our text is found. If you look carefully you will see the service of sin exemplified in the prophets of Baal; you will see the service of God exemplified in Elijah. I will come, in conclusion, to the same appeal with which I started, I will ask you to halt no longer, to make your choice, and to join with the men who worship Baal or God.

Look at the picture, I never read that story without feeling how graphically it sets before my vision the truth about the men who are serving sin, and serving self, and serving Satan. I look back at these prophets of Baal, and there are different points from which I view them. I see in them, first, a point for admiration; I look at them a little more closely, and I see a point for sarcasm; I look at them again, and I see a point for anger; finally, I look, and I see a point for pity.

I look today at the men who serve sin with high hand and outstretched arm, and I see exactly the same things - a point for admiration, a point for sarcasm, a point for anger, and a point for pity.

A point for admiration? someone says to me. What do you mean? I am not dealing with the halting multitude. There is nothing to admire in them. I am dealing with the prophets of Baal as they exemplify what sin is. What is the point for admiration? It is the courage, the daring, the enthusiasm, the force that these men put into their business. And I do not hesitate to say that I admire it. It was a daring thing for these men to accept the challenge of Elijah at all. And then there was no half-heartedness. All day they cried, "Oh, Baal, hear us." And there was no voice, no answer. And again they cried, and I watch them as the day wears on leaping in frenzy on the altar, stirring up the passion of their inner life with knives. I look at their zeal, at their earnestness, at their determination, and I admire them.

I look at the men who are sinning hard, and I admire them. I have a great deal more hope of winning that man who serves the devil well than the man who Stays half-way between God and the devil, and does not know which to serve. Oh, the passion men are putting into sin!

But I look again, and I see a point for sarcasm. It must be a tender sarcasm. Jesus had a great deal of sarcasm about Him. You cannot read the records of His life without finding it. God grant that our sarcasm may always be like His, very keen, but very tender, based on love, and yet flashing like a searchlight. Listen to Elijah. He looks at the men when the noonday has arrived, and he says: "Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is musing, or he is gone aside, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked." All of which means this, your gods are all very well until you are in trouble. Your gods will do when you do not need help, or to feel a presence, or know a power. Baal is all right so long as you are not face to face with a crisis. But get there, and you will know the folly of the whole business. Cry aloud, perhaps he is sleeping. Think of the sarcasm of it. Men driven wild with a frenzy of desire, and their god asleep!

You who make sin your god, who worship it, and serve it, because of what you get out of it, wait a moment. There is a day of crisis coming. It may come in different ways to you. It may come as bereavement, when the house is darkened, and the heart is sad, and some little child is put down into the grave. It may come as poverty, when riches take to themselves wings and fly away. It may come as death, when you yourself know that you are passing away. Now, oh, bereaved man - think me not unkind, for in God's name I would only drive you to truth - oh, poverty-stricken man, with nobody who cares to help you in the day of your adversity; oh, dying man, with the shadows creeping round you, cry aloud to your god, ask sin to help you now. You see the folly of it. You dare not. The thing for which you have sacrified your loyalty, the thing for which you have turned your back on God and Heaven and life, cannot help when the crisis comes. Where is your comfort, oh, bereaved man? For your own sake play the man, do not turn your back on Jesus Christ and sin against Him and crucify Him, and then when your child dies want His words to be uttered about resurrection. See this thing through. If you are going to turn your back on my Master tonight see it through. Oh, the unutterable folly of it, that a man will take his life, spirit, soul, and body, and pour all out in worship of the thing that never gives him an answering word of pity or of power when the crisis comes. And yet again I look at these men, and I find there is a point that demands my anger. It is the wilfulness of their folly. These people, many of them, who had become the prophets of Baal, and all such in the nation as had listened to the teaching, and followed the guidance of the prophets of Baal, who were they? They were the people who had such a wonderful history, people who belonged to the upper and the nether springs, people who possessed the oracles of God, and yet were deliberately choosing Baal because he gave license to passion and self.

The picture is repeated today. I look out on the servants of sin, and sometimes it seems as though the very anger of the heart becomes hot. Why? For the same reason that God is angry with men, because in their folly and perversity and wilfulness they deliberately choose the things that ruin them. Oh, yes, but let the last note be sounded.

I look at these prophets, and I find there is a point for pity. See the effect on them of their own sin. Admire the passion, if you will, as it burns. Be as sarcastic as you will, that in the presence of crisis there is no help. Be as angry as you will over the unutterable folly of wickedness, but look at them after the long, weary day, fainting, wounded men. You cannot look at the prophets of Baal in their weariness and their wounding without pitying them.

You will at once see how this applies to us. The Godly heart, the Christly heart always feels a great pity for the sinner. Oh, these wounded men, these hardened criminals, these ruined lives! Oh, these men, with physical constitution spoiled, and with mind diseased, and spiritual capacity paralyzed and dead! Oh, weep over them! Oh, the pity of it! Oh, dear man, that thou shouldest put passion into the business of destroying thyself! Oh, that thou shouldest take the Divinely bestowed powers of thy wondrous manhood, and burn them up only to burn thyself! Oh, the pity of it! The service of sin, there it is, passion without principle!

For a moment look on the other side, and in that one lonely man, Elijah, see the service of God exemplified.

First look at his boldness. Did we say it was a bold thing for the prophets of Baal to accept his challenge? It was a far bolder thing for one man to challenge eight hundred and fifty. He stood alone. He had an avowed purpose to attack idolatrous worship, and he stood confronting the king whose court was corrupt, and all associated with him.

It is not a blustering courage, a courage characterized by foolhardiness. It is not the courage that whistles in the dark. It is the courage that is quiet and calm and strong, calm when Elijah challenges the king as the troubler of Israel, calm in the waiting of the long day, calm in the final crises and in the midst of all circumstances. But these are only outward things.

Mark not merely the boldness and the calmness of this servant of God; but discover the reason of the boldness, of the calmness. At last the prophets have done, and have failed. At last his own sacrifice is laid on his altar, and with magnificent daring he has saturated the whole sacrifice and altar with water until the very trench is full of it. If you want really to see Elijah, you must see him now; see him as he comes quietly forward toward that altar in the presence of all those people, and hear him as he says, "Oh, Lord, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that Thou, Lord, art God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again." Then the fire fell. Here we are at the heart of it. Elijah quietly built his altar, placed his sacrifice, and then lifted his voice to God, and the moment the cry of His servant reached the ear of God the fire fell.

I am not surprised that Elijah was bold now, I am not surprised that Elijah was calm now. He is seen now as the man who lived by faith, in touch with the secret forces. He is seen to be a man who had communion with God. He knew how to move the hand that holds the world, to bring deliverance down. He lived, not in the power of things seen, but in the power and possession of the unseen. The prophets had cut themselves, and cried in an agony to a god who did not answer, because he did not exist. In the calm of eventide, without frenzy, with quiet bold dignity, this man spoke and fire fell.

This is the picture of the life of the Christian man. That is what we are asking you to choose. You can be bold, you can be calm, you can be courageous, and why? Because if you worship God your life is linked to Omnipotence, your life is linked to Omniscience, your life is linked to Omnipresence.

I will say no more to you save this: I speak here as in God's presence. I have chosen. I will follow God. I will be a Christian man, and now I know that this life of mine is linked to the infinite wisdom of God, and this, if I will but use it, will guide me until time shall blossom into eternity. I, so weak and frail that the slightest breath of temptation will make me sin, if I try to fight it alone - and I speak the thing I know - I am linked to the power of God, and "I can do all things in Christ, Who strengtheneth me." And I that am often lonely if I trust to other friends and other helpers, my life is linked to God, Who is always just where I am. At home, He is there; in the railway train, He is there; in the place of joy, He is there, and His laughter mingles with mine; in the place of sorrow, He is there, and His heart is moved with pity and with help. I am never away from Him.

How long halt ye? How long? How long? I pray you, if sin be the god, follow it. But, oh, if this God be God, if this be life indeed, follow it, follow Him. How long? How long? And why should not the answer be given now, even as my last words are sounding in your ears? God grant that in the hearts of men and women the answer may go up. No longer. Here I choose, and I will give myself to Thee, soul and body Thine to be, wholly Thine forevermore.