**VOLUME 7; CHAPTER 17 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE UNSTRAITENED CHRIST by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach.*

*Acts 1:1*

THIS AT FIRST SIGHT APPEARS A STRANGE OPENING TO A book, and yet it is perfectly natural when we remember that the writer had already written another pamphlet, which we know as the Gospel according to Luke. It is to that he makes reference when he writes, "The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach."

To this link of connection I desire to draw your attention, in order that we may understand the true character of this book of the Acts of the Apostles, and from such understanding deduce certain lessons of profound and paramount importance to the whole Church of Jesus Christ.

First, Luke does not say in speaking of his previous pamphlet, "The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus did and taught." He says, "The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach." The story of Luke, as he gives it to us in the Gospel, is the story of the beginnings of the doing and teaching of Jesus.

Over twenty years ago one of the most brilliant of our journalists went to see the representation of the Oberammergau Passion play. When he came back he wrote an account of what he had seen, and he called the little book, "The Story that Transformed the World." I have no desire to be hypercritical, but while I greatly enjoyed reading the book, I join issue altogether with the suggestion of the title, that the world has been transformed by the telling of a story. I do not mean to say that the world has not been transformed. I hold that it has been transformed as the result of the coming of Christ, and the message and ministry of Christ in every successive century, but what I do say is that this transformation has not been brought about by the telling of a story. There never was such a story as the story of Jesus. Never was story so pathetic, so tender, so beautiful, so strong. But I do not hesitate to say that if there had been nothing more than a story it would have lost its power long ago. Men have not been remade, and nationalities reborn, and human society permeated with new influences and new thoughts and new conceptions by the telling of a story. How, then, has the world been transformed? The answer is suggested by the underlying truth contained in my text. The story is the story of the things He began to do and teach. The world has been transformed by the things He has continued to do and teach. The world has not been transformed by the telling of the story of a death and a life transcendently beautiful nineteen centuries ago. The world has been transformed by the living presence of the living Christ in every successive century. He began to do, and, thank God, He has never ceased doing; He began to teach, and, thank God, He has never ceased teaching. Christ did not pass away from the world when He ascended; He has been here ever since, and through every successive century He has been busy doing and teaching. Thus has the world been transformed. This congregation is not gathered round the memory of a Christ Who was. It is gathered round the presence of a Christ Who is. We are not here because of the pathetic and majestic and radiantly beautiful story of what happened nineteen centuries ago. We are here because Christ is here, the same living Lord, by the power of His Holy Spirit, doing things among men, still teaching men, even as of old.

What, then, is the book of the Acts of the Apostles? It is the first fragment of Church history. It is the first chapter in the story of the things that Jesus has continued to do and teach.

Let us go back to the Gospel of Luke, to something that Jesus said while He was still among men:

I came to cast fire upon the earth, and what do I desire? I would that it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! (Luke 12:49,50).

In these words our Lord declared that He had come to the world to pour on men a baptism of fire; He declared the supreme wish of His heart was that that baptism might be poured out, that that work might be accomplished; but He also declared He could not send the fire until He Himself had been baptized with a baptism toward which His face was set. What was that baptism? The baptism of the Cross. So that Jesus, in effect, stated that He could not do His greatest work until after the Cross, that He was straitened, limited, confined, and only beginning His doing and teaching. He could not carry either to consummation until He Himself had been immersed in the great baptism of death, the mysterious passion baptism of the Cross.

In the book of the Acts of the Apostles I stand by the side of Jesus and listen to Him after His baptism, after the Cross, and I do not hear Him saying, "I am straitened." I hear Him saying now, "John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." The Cross being accomplished, the greater work begins.

From this beginning the book runs on. In the second chapter we read, "And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place"; and the rest you know: the fire baptism came, and in its coming the little group of disciples were made one with Jesus as they never had been one with Him in the days of His flesh. Peter and James and John and the rest never knew Jesus perfectly until He was dead, buried, risen, ascended, and had poured on them the gift of the Holy Ghost. Then their eyes were opened, then their ears were unstopped, then their heart lost its frost and flamed with fire, then Peter ceased to be anxious about keys. He was prepared for the Cross, if by any means he could suffer and serve with Christ; and in the little company of disciples baptized with the Holy Ghost and fire Jesus found an enlarged sphere of operation. He began the mightier works which He could not do before, but which He had promised they should do when He had gone to the Father.

I love the Gospel story, for it gives me the beginnings of things, but when I come to the Acts of the Apostles I feel myself in the tremendous movement of the larger Christ, of the more infinite power, no longer straitened, confined, and shut up within Himself, but liberated through His passion baptism. Here I see Him moving to the greater works.

That is the significance of this introduction. Let us now look at it from another standpoint. If, indeed, I have in the Gospel the story of what Jesus began to do and teach, and if in the Acts of the Apostles, and all Church history, I have the story of what He continued to do and teach, it becomes manifest that there will be no practical and radical difference between the principles on which He began to do and those on which He has continued to do. In the Gospel I learn what is the passion of His heart, what is the intention of His purpose, and what is the manifestation of His power; and I may test my work, my responsibility, by asking the question, Am I living and serving on the same lines as did the Christ? What He did, He does, only with increased power. He began and He continues on the same lines.

I sometimes hear people say that what we need in Christian service is to see to it that we are on parallel lines with Jesus Christ. Again, I do not want to be hypercritical, but it is a very weak geometrical illustration. Parallel lines are lines which never come together. We do not want to be on parallel lines with Jesus. We want to be on His lines exactly. The perfect geometrical figures illustrative of the methods of God are always those of the pyramid or the square or the circle.

In this case take the circle. At the center is Jesus. In one of those inimitable sermons of Joseph Parker on Jesus in the midst, he spoke of Jesus as in the midst of the doctors, as crucified in the midst of thieves, as in the midst of two or three gathered together in His name, and, finally, as in the midst of the throne, a Lamb as it had been slain. Always in the midst, always at the center. Go back and take one prophetic word of the past, the word of Isaiah, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth"; in the center, God manifest in Christ; the circumference, "all the ends of the earth." Or come once more to the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and there find the same great figure. He stands, the center of a very small group of disciples, and they do not understand Him. They are asking foolish questions about the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel. Jesus is the center. What is the first circle? The disciples. To this first circle of men gathered round Him He says, "It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within His own authority. But ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be My witnesses." Where? Now watch the circles widening round Him, "In Jerusalem," that is the city close at hand; "and in all Judaea," that is the suburbs; "and in Samaria," that is the country lying out further still. Where does He finish? "Unto the uttermost part of the earth." Those are the circles which sweep around the Christ. How am I to serve the Christ? By serving Jerusalem. How am I to serve Jerusalem? By serving Judaea. How am I to serve Judaea? By serving Samaria. How am I to serve Samaria? By serving the uttermost part of the earth.

Do not forget that we have never obeyed Him yet. The vast part of the world has never heard the Gospel. How shall we fulfil all these responsibilities? By getting on parallel lines? No, by getting on the same lines of service. The radii of a circle may be carried far, but they are the same lines at the uttermost circumference as those which rest in the center.

This is the truth which lies like a burden on my heart today, the great truth I want to bring to others, not so much for instruction as for encouragement. All He began to do He is still doing, and we are His fellow workers; all He began to teach He is still teaching, and we are His messengers.

In looking back at the story of Jesus as we have it in the Gospels, I find general principles of present value. When Jesus began, He attracted the multitudes; when Jesus began, He was attracted by the multitudes; when Jesus began, He knew the multitudes; when Jesus began, the multitudes knew Him.

First, Jesus began to attract the multitudes. Than this nothing is more obvious. Wherever He came in the days of His public ministry the crowds came too. He was weary and crossed the sea, and when the boat reached the other side of the lake they found waiting for Him vast multitudes who had run round the shore, outrunning the boat, in order to be there when He arrived.

On another occasion He said to His disciples, "Let us go into a desert place, and rest a while." They never reached the desert place; they got into the boat, and crossed the lake; but when they got to the other side vast multitudes were waiting for Him. They thronged Him, they "pressed Him," to use the expression of Mark.

The crowds who came to Jesus in the days of His flesh were not crowds composed of one particular class of people; rulers were in the crowds, fishermen, Pharisees, and publicans were in the crowds. There is a very popular fallacy abroad in the world that Jesus attracted persons of only one class, the poorer people, the working people. It is not true. Now some of you are thinking that "the common people heard Him gladly." Yes, and no! That passage has been much misquoted. To begin with, the Bible never insults that class of people by calling them common in our sense of the word common. That phrase occurs in the Gospel of Mark, and nowhere else. Read Mark's Gospel and put a pencil mark under this phrase "much people." It runs all through the Gospel. Mark seems to be a man always listening to the tramp of the crowds as they thronged on Jesus. Once, in the course of translating the Gospel of Mark, both King James's translators and the Revisers, for some reason, have rendered the Greek phrase "much people" "common people"; it is exactly the same phrase. "Common" does not mean poor people, working people. It means all sorts and conditions of people, the mixed multitude, the common crowd. It is quite time we got rid of this fallacy; I am quite willing to grant that there were more poor people than rich, because there are always more poor than rich in the world, always more illiterate people than learned. But Jesus Christ attracted all sorts and conditions of people. He was the great Center of attraction. The one thing people could not do with Him was to let Him alone. Wherever He came they came, and they thronged after Him in the country places, in the cities, along the highways.

These were the beginnings. Has that ceased to be true? Has Jesus lost His power to attract, and to attract all sorts and conditions of men? I want to say to you, and I want to say it quietly and finally and deliberately and without apology, that Jesus Christ is just as attractive a personality in the twentieth century as He was at the dawn of the first in old Judaea. He still attracts men and women to Himself.

The problem of the empty church in the midst of a vast population in London, or anywhere else, has a deeper problem still underlying it, the problem of an absent or a hidden Christ. I do not care where it is, I do not care what is the class of people round about it. Find me any empty church in any populous district, and let Jesus Christ be seen and known and preached there, and men will still crowd to Him just as they always crowded to Him. I am not criticizing the ministry, I am criticizing the Church, and I say that wherever you find me the problem we are discussing in conferences and synods, it is not the problem of how to get the crowds into the church, it is the problem of how to show Christ in the church. He will get the crowd; He attracts men always.

Jesus may be hidden by priestism, by ecclesiasticism, by the sordid selfishness of people who take His name on their lips but lack His love in their hearts. He may be hidden by people who deny His Spirit in the way in which they refuse to welcome the outcast if the outcast enters the church. But let the great, warm, loving heart of the Christ be shown, and the people will come. The things which hide Him eventually drive Him out. But let Him be present, managing the whole business, impulsing all the service, shining through the lovelit eyes of His own children, teaching in gentle language the broken-hearted sinner that comes within the building; let but Christ be seen in His people, let but Christ be manifested, and men will crowd to Him. Jesus is not the Saviour of a caste. He was never attracted by the broad phylactery or the wide border of the garment. He was never repelled by the beggar in rags. I was going to say He never saw the phylactery and rags, and yet He saw everything. In some senses, it is true, He did not see the garment, for, looking at the man, He did not see the accidental trappings of his birth; He saw the immortal soul that dwelt in his house of clay, and when He sees men through our eyes, and touches men with our hands, they will come with their woes and sin and sorrow.

It is not only true that He attracted the crowds, it is also true that He was attracted by the crowds. Where the crowds were He went. What drew Him to the great feasts in Jerusalem, the feast of Tabernacles, the Passover feast, and all the rest? I do not hesitate to say it was the crowd that drew Him, not the ceremony, which was effete, worn out, spoiled by the ritualism and the rationalism of His age. "When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion." And I say it reverently of my Master, and yet it is true, He could not keep away from the crowds. I see Him one day, tired, going into a house to rest, and immediately after there is this very remarkable statement, "He could not be hid." Why not? Read on, and you will find why. Outside is the crowd, and in the crowd one poor woman is in need, and the sorrows of the woman and the surging sorrows of the crowd dragged Him from the house in order that He might help and serve. Oh, yes, and He was attracted by them as they were, sinful souls and ungrateful. He saw them not only as they were. He saw them as they might be, and He loved them in the midst of their sin and degradation, and what repelled others attracted Him.

Has Christ changed? Nay, verily. The most attractive center to Jesus Christ is not the church half empty. But the theater if it is full. I know men and women are there for amusement, sinning their life away. Thank God when a church has wisdom enough to say, We will reach these people. It shows the Church has caught the Spirit of the Christ. He is attracted by the people. There comes back to my mind a quaint old piece of poetry. It teaches a great lesson in simple form:

The parish priest of austerity

Climbed up in a high church steeple,

To be nearer God, so that he might hand

His word down to the people.

And in sermon script he daily wrote

What he thought was sent from Heaven;

And he dropped it down on the people's heads

Two times one day in seven.

In his age God said, "Come down and die,"

And he cried out from the steeple:

"Where art Thou, Lord?" and the Lord replied,

"Down here among My people."

That is the profound lesson of the life of Jesus. He did not climb away from people to drop the Gospel down on their heads. He is in the midst of the wounding and the woe and the weariness of this present day. Wherever you see a crowd of people the Christ is there. In the Labor Church He is there, not as the Head of the Labor Church, but He is there because men are there; in the fashionable West End, with its veneered rottenness and its cultured devilry, because He loves the people; in the East, with its overwhelming despair and its terrible wail of suffering and sorrow, He is there. They abuse Him; it does not matter, He loves them. Where the crowds are the Christ is. If we want to live near to Jesus we must get near the crowds, get close by their sorrows, and feel them; near their tears, to dry them; under their burdens, to lift them.

Do not talk to me about coming revivals. The revival has come when the Church has caught the compassion of Christ, and is near the sorrows of the world to lift and heal them.

I go back to my book of Isaiah, and I read that the ancient people of God said, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord." And how did God answer them? He answered by saying, "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion, put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem." It is as though God said to His people, Do not ask me to awake; I have never been asleep. You must awake! And while today we cry, "Awake, O arm of the Lord," I hear the answer, I have never been asleep. I have never slumbered. It is you who must awake!

Let me take a step further. Not only is it true that Jesus attracted the crowds, and was attracted by the crowds; it is also true that He knew the crowds. He knew their possibilities; He knew their agonies. Jesus never upbraided the multitudes. He did upbraid the men whose false philosophies were ruining the multitudes; but He never upbraided the multitudes. He knew them in their sin and sorrow, knew them in their capacity, knew them perfectly. You remember the great word in the close of the second chapter of John's Gospel, "Many believed on His name, beholding His signs which He did. But Jesus did not trust Himself unto them, for that He knew all men, and because He needed not that anyone should bear witness concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man." Every broken heart that came to Him, He knew it and all its sorrow.

He knows the crowds today. It was Charles Kingsley who said, "We may choose to look at the masses in the gross as subjects for statistics, and, of course, where possible, for profit, but there is One Who knows every temptation of each slattern and gin-drinker and street boy." Yes, He knows. But you say, Why emphasize it? Because I want to remind you that, knowing all, He loved men, thought they were worth dying for. Oh, God, help us to realize it. When you are tempted by some article in some brilliant magazine to think that the people are not worth living for and dying for, get back to the Christ, and remember that over all the woe and misery of London the shadow of the Cross is the greatest light that shines, as it tells us until this moment, whatever the people may think of Him, He reckoned that they were worth dying for. God help us to have the same estimate.

Finally, my brethren, not only is it true He knew them; it is true they knew Him. Not perfectly, I grant you, but they knew Him by name, by hearing, and by sight; and the more the multitudes of His day came to know Him with that keen, acute, mystic consciousness, the more they were dissatisfied with any save Himself. The Pharisees said, "The world is gone after Him." One came to Him when He came down from the mount of transfiguration, and said, "Master, have mercy on my son, my only begotten son; a devil vexes him sore, and I brought him to Thy disciples, and they could not cure him." But the man knew that Jesus could, and this consciousness of the power of Christ swayed the multitudes all through that region. You say that is changed. No, it is not. The multitudes today know the living Christ of God. Believe me, you cannot deceive humanity. They still know the difference between the method of the philosopher and the living, warm, powerful Christ; the multitudes know the difference between a stone, polish it as you will, and bread. And you may preach the Christ, Who is the Founder of a system of ethics, until your church is empty, and you may preach a cold, passionless Christ, Who is the ideal of perfection, until men are driven away by your preaching. But preach the Christ of the Cross and the warm mystery of His shed blood, and that Christ still attracts men, and saves men; and men know Him, and you cannot deceive the multitudes.

He began, and I hear Him speak as He begins. What does He say? "I am the Light of the world." But He is going away, and yet He is going away to come again, and to carry on His work. What does He say now? "Ye are the light of the world"; that is to say, we of the Christian Church, we of the Christian faith, are the instruments through which Christ elects, in great grace and mercy, to carry on His work.

Jesus wants to get to men through us. Are we at His disposal? It is a cheap and sentimental Christianity that sings songs about Heaven and hopes to get there. Are we saints, separated to Him? Are our feet ready to run on His errands? Are our hands ready to minister to His bidding? Are our eyes ready to flash with His love? Are we ready to suffer, to serve, and die with Him? That is the question.

He wants to get men to Himself through us. Are we likely to attract them? I am only asking the question; God help us to answer it alone. Is it possible that the men you pay wages to will be attracted toward the Christ through you? Dear Sunday-school teacher, has Jesus a chance to make the children in your class see how lovely He is?

He is waiting for our feet to run on errands, our hands to touch men with His love, our voices to sing with the tone of His infinite compassion, the Gospel of His grace. Are we at His disposal? That is the question of the hour. May God grant that we shall be able to carry on His victories until even His heart is satisfied.