**VOLUME 8; CHAPTER 05 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**SIN, SORROW, SILENCE by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Blessed is he whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD doesn't impute iniquity, in whose spirit there is no deceit. When I kept silence, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me. My strength was sapped in the heat of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to you. I didn't hide my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the LORD, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah. For this, let everyone who is godly pray to you in a time when you may be found. Surely when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach to him. You are my hiding place. You will preserve me from trouble. You will surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah. I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you shall go. I will counsel you with my eye on you. Don't be like the horse, or like the mule, which have no understanding, who are controlled by bit and bridle, or else they will not come near to you. Many sorrows come to the wicked, but loving kindness shall surround him who trusts in the LORD. Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, you righteous! Shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart!*

*Psalm 32*

WHOEVER WROTE THIS PSALM KNEW MUCH OF SPIRITUAL experience on ordinary human levels. It is difficult sometimes to understand how some of these psalms were written so long before the coming of Christ. They seem to have been written by men who were almost as familiar as we are with all the great facts of the grace of God, as that grace was made known in Christ Jesus.

Among all of them, I do not know one that has more of the evangelical spirit than this, the thirty-second. Who that knows anything of the abounding and abundant grace of God has not at sometime or another found a suitable vehicle of expression in its language? Observe the experiences that thrill throughout it. Sin is here, not as a theory, but as an experience. It was written by a man who knew sin, who knew it in his own life, who knew its bitterness, its burden, its hatefulness; who had been very profoundly under conviction of sin.

Here, also, is the experience of sorrow, sorrow described in figurative language as the overflowing of waters; described, although not in words, yet inferentially, as the sweeping of a great storm; described, again, by inference as a prison house. All these figures are here, not actually named, but suggested by the terms that the psalmist used to describe his victory over sorrow.

The psalmist knew also that desolating experience of ignorance with which we are all familiar. I do not mean merely intellectual ignorance, but spiritual ignorance, the ignorance of not knowing which way to take, the ignorance of perplexity about the things of life created by the problems that vex the soul. All these experiences of the soul are grouped and referred to in this psalm.

Yet observe again that the things to which I have referred, sin as an experience, sorrow as an experience, ignorance or perplexity, or, if you will, silence - for I think the word "silence" is a most eloquent word to express what we feel when we do not see the way, or know the way, when there is no light upon the pathway, or voice speaking to us - sin, sorrow, silence; all the experiences of the human heart are here in order that over against them may be placed the things that correct them, the things that cancel them. If this man knew sin he knew forgiveness. If this man was familiar with sorrow he had experienced a wonderful succor. If this man was conscious of silence he had been brought into the place of instruction, and of a speech that had become to him the very guide and counsel of all his days.

Therefore, this is a psalm that thrills to tireless music, and makes its perpetual appeal to the heart of those who share these common human experiences.

Now, let us look a little more closely. First of all, observe its opening exclamation and its closing appeal. Between these we shall find a very definite movement of experience. When this man sat down to write this psalm he began with a doxology. It is the fashion of the Church today to close services with doxologies. The fashion of the Bible is to begin with the doxology. We find it in the psalms and in the epistles. There are doxologies at the close also, but the great writers of the Bible constantly began with a note of praise and gave their reasons for praise afterwards.

The first verse of the psalm reads thus:

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Whereas that may be a very accurate and beautiful sentence, in the Hebrew it reads somewhat differently; this is what the psalmist wrote:

O the blessings of transgression forgiven, and sin covered.

As a matter of fact, in that first verse there is no personal pronoun. The psalmist was not describing an experience in which man has any place, or any part, except as the result of something that God has done for him, and provided for him.

It is an exclamation resulting from contemplation and meditation. All the experience which he was about to describe in the psalm found its vent in his opening doxology. The blessings are two: transgressing forgiven, and sin covered. Every form of sin is recognized in the course of the psalm. Presently there is a reference to iniquity. All these are different words, conveying different ideas of sin.

The Hebrew word, "transgression," means the actual, wilful wrongdoing of which a man is conscious, and of which he is guilty. "Sin" is the common Hebrew word which has the same significance as the common Greek word, namely, missing the mark. No day passes in my life in which I do not sin, which does not necessarily mean that I sin wilfully but that I come short of the glory, I fail of the highest, I do not attain unto the best. After thirty years at least of the experience of following Jesus Christ, the apostle had to say, "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect. … I count not myself yet to have apprehended." In so much as I have not attained, in so much as I am not yet made perfect, in so much as I have not yet apprehended, I am a sinner, I miss the mark, I come short, I do not reach the standard.

There are thus two ideas in this opening doxology: one wilful and positive sin, the other, missing the mark, in which will may have no part. Both are dealt with; the transgression is forgiven, and missing the mark is covered. That is the opening exclamation. It is that of a man, conscious of God's infinite grace, of what someone has spoken of, and I think wonder-fully spoken of, as "the incredible mercy of God."

O the blessings of transgression forgiven, and sin covered.

The psalm ends with an appeal,

Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous;

And shout for joy all ye that are upright in heart.

The opening exclamation and the closing appeal are closely linked. "Oh the blessings of transgression forgiven." "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous." "Of sin covered." "Shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart." The blessings of the forgiveness of transgression and of the covering of sin come from God, and in response to those blessings we are called on to be glad in the Lord, and to shout for joy.

Between that opening exclamation and that closing appeal we have the general movement of the psalm, a record of the experiences of life in sin, in sorrow, and in those silences in which the soul is ignorant as to the right way to go and the right thing to do.

First, as to sin. Everything is founded on a right relationship with God, which results from the activity of grace as expressed in the first verse. Moving out from that provision of grace, the psalmist deals with the individual. "Blessed is the man." In the first verse is an exclamation: "O the blessings," the blessings that God provides for the race; and consequently, of course, for individual men; but now, from that contemplation of the whole economy of God's grace, he passes to the individual soul.

Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity,

And in whose spirit there is no guile.

Here the psalmist describes a man standing before a judge, the judge being the Lord, the judge being Jehovah. Here the psalmist describes a man acquitted by his judge: the Lord imputeth not iniquity. Here, moreover, the psalmist reveals the condition on which that judge will acquit the man, "in whose spirit there is no guile." Let it be remembered that we cannot have this second blessing apart from the first. There must be, first, the fact of the infinite blessings in the economy of God, of transgression forgiven, and of sin covered. That is taken for granted in the first outburst of praise. This psalm was written, if not consciously, yet most surely, under the shadow of the Cross. It could not have been written anywhere else. Nowhere else can we find the possibility of transgression being forgiven and sin being covered. Calvary, dark Calvary, with all its mystery of darkness and of light, of sin and of salvation, of the unveiling of sin in the light of the glory of God, and the unveiling of the grace of God against the dark background of sin. All that is expressed in the first verse; then we get to the second verse, and we find how God is prepared to deal with a man who is conscious of sin, of iniquity, which is perverseness, crookedness, the life out of the straight.

This verse always comforts my heart, because the psalmist said: "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." He did not say, Blessed is the man unto whom his neighbor imputeth not iniquity. I am very thankful for that. He did not say, Blessed is the man unto whom those to whom he ministers impute not iniquity. The man stands at no judgment bar save that of God, and, believe me, it is far easier to please God than anybody else. I would much rather have to please God for one day than anybody else in the world. It is far easier to please Him, for He is far more reasonable, more patient than are men, for His reasonableness and patience are based on His perfect knowledge. I think one of the most wonderful things in the Bible is that in speaking of the ultimate rule of the earth by God's anointed King it declares that He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes or by the hearing of His ears. Think of judgment in England today, think of law in England today, think of any law court into which you may go - everything is based on the sight of the eyes and the hearing of the ears, and there is no other way in which men can judge. In every court of law witnesses give evidence of what they saw and heard, and the jury listen and find their verdict, and the judge passes his sentence, on the sight of the eyes and the hearing of the ears. God does not judge by the sight of the eyes or by the hearing of the ears. How, then, does He judge? His judgments are righteous. They are so because they are based on His knowledge of all the underlying facts of the case. There is an old saying, To know all is to forgive all. It may be falsely used, but there is a vast amount of truth in it, and we may depend on it: if we knew all we should be far more likely to forgive most men than to condemn them.

"Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." There is a grandeur about this statement in that it shuts the man up to God, excludes all other judges and juries, and says: Stand before God, and let Him judge you!

And what will He do if a man will stand there? It depends on the man. God will not impute iniquity to him if there is no guile in his spirit. That is the condition. What is guile? Deceit, cloaking over, trying to hide! We are inclined to say that no man can practice guile in the presence of God. Think again. Oh, how constantly we do it by arguing in God's presence that some evil thing is not so very evil, or we try to find an excuse for sin. That is guile. God imputes iniquity, fastens the guilt on the soul that is hiding it; but if the sin be confessed, He puts away the guilt which the man cannot himself put away. If there be no guile, if there be no cloaking, no hiding, if the moment has come in which I am constrained to say, Oh, God, I have hidden this thing long enough by trying to excuse it; I have done with it; God be merciful to me a sinner; then, in a moment, swift as the lightning's flash and swifter, sweet and gentle as the daybreak, the guile is no longer imputed, the man is acquitted; God immediately pronounces on that man the verdict of guiltless, and the man says, "Happy is the man unto whom Jehovah imputeth not iniquity, in whose spirit there is no guile." That is how God deals with sin.

In order that this may be clearer, the psalmist immediately described the contrary experience, showing exactly what happened in his own soul when there was guile there, when he was cloaking something evil, and hiding it.

When I kept silence, my bones waxed old

Through my roaring all the day long.

For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me;

My moisture was changed as with the drought of summer.

I do not think there is any language in all the Bible more wonderful in its clear, concise, graphic, startling revelation of the experience of a soul trying to hide sin from God. When I kept silence, when I knew, knew in the deepest of me that something was wrong but would not own it, I tried to put a brave face on it and excuse it to myself, and to make myself believe - strange and devilish deceit - that God did not disapprove, which was only another way of trying to make myself believe God did not know. Then

My bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long;

My moisture was changed into the drought of summer.

There was no life; there was no sap. What that means may be learned by quotation from another psalm, "The trees of the Lord are full of sap." The Hebrew does not say "sap." The word has been added by translators, and it is very full of beauty. Yet another psalm will help us, the one which declares that those who put their trust in God are like trees planted by the rivers of water. A tree planted by the rivers of water is a tree whose roots run down and under, and find their way to the water. In the case of such a tree, a living, healthy tree, we may take the utmost bough and break it, or take a leaf and break it in twain, and sap exudes. The trees of the Lord are full.

My moisture was turned into the drought of summer. There was no sap, no life. The godly man is like the tree planted by the rivers of water. There is sap, he is full of it. In business he is full of life; and in everything full of strength. But the man with sin unconfessed is like a tree in the desert, having no water; it is dry, scorched, burnt up. His faith in God fails. The death of faith in God expresses itself in the death of faith in one's fellow man. The man who believes in God believes in humanity. The man who loses his faith in God begins to question humanity, is suspicious of everyone. That is the condition of those who keep silence.

The psalmist then tells us why his bones waxed old and moisture was changed into drought:

For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me.

That sounds severe, and so it is, but it is full of beauty. Not only is the severity of God in it, but also His goodness. It is as though the psalmist had said: In those days when I kept silence and tried to hide my sin Thou didst give me no peace, Thy hand was always on me, always troubling me; the thing I tried to hide Thou didst keep alive within me as a consciousness. That habit of life, that friendship that God condemned, that thing we persisted in, how it haunted us! That was God's hand on us! He will not let us escape. We argue it out and think it is settled, and go on, and, suddenly, it rises before us again: the controversy with God is continued, and God never rests until it ends in our submission, if we are His children:

Day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me.

Now take the opposite:

I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid.

P69 Then the psalmist goes yet further back to show how quickly God answered, and how quickly God acted. Whereas the psalmist did acknowledge the sin and ceased to hide the iniquity, God did not wait for the actual acknowledgment, but in the moment when the psalmist decided he would do so God met him;

I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord;

And Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.

I said I would do it, and the moment I made up my mind Thou didst act. That is a true picture of God. Some child of God may be burdened with sin, sin persisted in; if such a one this moment will say, I will confess my sin, then, in the moment in which the heart has taken the attitude of confession, God will forgive the iniquity of the sin.

How truly the prophet described Him as "a God ready to pardon." Oh for some figure of speech to help men to understand the meaning of that "ready to pardon." There is no figure of speech finer than that of this psalm: He is so ready to pardon that when man makes up his mind to confess, he is forgiven before he does confess. God does not wait for your formalities; He deals with your attitudes. He does not wait until the Sabbath day comes round. He does not wait until the human confessional is open. He does not wait until the special Inquiry Meeting is called at the end of the service. He does not wait for an hour. This is not ancient history; it is present fact. At this moment, without sigh or sound that mortal ear can detect, or attitude that the eye of man can observe even before the thing is said, when I make up my mind to confess, "Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin!" Do you wonder that when this man was going to write a psalm about this matter he had to begin:

O the blessings of transgression forgiven, and sin covered.

In the moment in which a man ceases guile and makes his soul naked in the eyes of God he is forgiven. God, in an awe-inspiring mystery, respects the veil that a man tries to fling over himself, and excludes Himself from communion with the man until the man tears the veil and says, I am going to be before God what I really am, when, in that moment, God makes him what He would have the man to be.

Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.

Then follow the matters of sorrow and silence. "For this let everyone that is Godly pray." "For this" means because of this or for this cause. It does not mean we are to pray for forgiveness. There is no need to do that. All we have to do to obtain forgiveness is to quit hypocrisy, and to make our souls naked, and confess. So it is not that we are to pray for forgiveness, but because of it. The questions of sin and sorrow are intimately related, and the place of prayer is thus guarded. It is only when a man is guileless before God, and sin is dealt with by God, that he has free access to the place of prayer. Having that access, a man finds that the way of prayer is the way of deliverance in sorrow.

Surely when the great waters overflow they shall not reach unto him.

That is an apparent contradiction. When the great waters overflow they shall not reach him! That is a paradox indeed. It is the picture of a man in the middle of overflowing waters, but the waters do not reach him. The same thought is in the next figure:

Thou art my hiding place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble.

Not keep me from going into trouble, but preserve me from when I am in it.

Thou wilt compass me about with songs of deliverance.

Not keep me from going into prison, nor even necessarily bring me out of prison; but enable me to sing in prison!

The psalmist does not declare that the Godly man is to be immune from sorrow, but that he is to be triumphant over it, that sorrow is not to be allowed to harm him. Great waves and billows will overflow him, so that the Godly man of all godly men, God's own Son, could perfectly say, All Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over Me! Oh, the waves and the billows that have gone over our heads, floods of great waters; and yet, even though at the moment we felt as though we were about to be drowned, we were not drowned! The great waters have not reached, they have not harmed, they have not destroyed us, because we had access to God by prayer, and so sin was dealt with. We prayed to Him in the time when the proud waters went over our souls, and we were delivered.

Thou art my hiding place; Thou wilt preserve me from trouble.

Quite literally, Thou wilt preserve me in a tight place. Oh, yes, we may often be in a tight place, but we shall be preserved; for nearer to us than all the pressure of circumstances is God, and though circumstances press until we think we shall be ground to powder, we never are, because the resistance of God against the pressure of circumstances keeps us safe.

And yet again,

Thou wilt compass me about with songs of deliverance.

Such songs are sung in prison. We are familiar with the New Testament illustration. Paul and Silas sang praises when they got out of prison? No! After the thunder, after the earth-quake that shook their feet loose from the stocks? No. They sang with feet fast in the stocks, with backs sore from Philippian rods. That is the place of song to the forgiven soul. The psalmist knew sorrows, knew the sweeping of the storm, knew the rolling of the waters, knew the loneliness of the prison house; but he knew deliverance, he knew a hiding place in which he was safe, and therefore he could sing in the midst of the sorrowful hours.

Then he passed to the matter of silence, and now he seems to have been so full of the consciousness of God that he adopted the language of God, changed the methods of his speech, and did not sing of God, but wrote as though God were singing to him:

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go;

I will counsel thee with Mine eye upon thee.

Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding;

Whose trappings must be bit and bridle to hold them in,

Else they will not come near unto thee.

Many sorrows shall be to the wicked:

But he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about.

"I will instruct thee," that is, I will make thee circumspect, I will make thee intelligent. "I will teach thee in the way which thou shalt go," that is, I will point out thy way with the finger. This is a picture of God dealing with a soul troubled, perplexed. The sorrow of silence is the worst of all, the appalling perplexity of hearing no voice in the hour of greatest need. God says, I will make thee intelligent, and then with My finger I will point out the way. It is as though God bent over the soul perplexed and in difficulty about the way, and said, I will give thee the capacity for understanding Me, and having done it, I will show you the right way. And, more, I will counsel thee; not, I will guide thee with mine eye, but, I will talk to you, and give you counsel with My eye on you. I will never lose sight of you.

Then follows a loving word, which is most arresting. It may thus be expressed bluntly: Do not be a mule! The horse and the mule need to be kept near to their drivers, with bit and bridle, so that they may be controlled, God says, I do not want to put a bit in your mouth; I want to keep you near Me in other ways. If we will not yield to the constraint of His guidance, then He will put bits into our mouths; but He would rather that we waited for Him, watched for the pointing of His finger, listened for the whisper of His word, and followed the light in His eye.

What wonder that the psalmist finished as he did:

Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous!

If we have done with our hypocrisy, He will put away our sin; that being settled, if we pray, He will guard us from all the evil of our sorrows; He will guide us with His counsel. Then let us be glad in the Lord, and let us not be content with being glad, let us obey the further command:

Shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.

When men really know God, they become hilarious, full of laughter and merriment and song and perpetual gladness.

So may He in His grace lead us into the secrets of communion.