**VOLUME 8; CHAPTER 06 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**HOPE by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*By hope were we saved.*

*Romans 8:24*

THE EXPERIENCE OF HOPE IS THAT OF TRIUMPH OVER CONDITIONS and circumstances which are calculated to produce despair. Where there is no place for despair there is none for hope. If there is no danger of despair there is no possibility or necessity for hope. The old English word "hope," in all its mutations, has retained the sense of expectation, of something desired and not yet attained. The Greek word, of which it is a translation in my text, coming to us as it does from a primitive word meaning anticipation, and almost always anticipation with pleasure, has exactly the same significance. Indeed, the word is used in the New Testament invariably in the sense of anticipation with pleasure, and in the sense of desire. When that which is anticipated is realized, there is room neither for despair nor hope; when faith is lost to sight, then hope in full fruition dies; or, as the writer of this letter says in immediate connection with my text, "Hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopeth for that which he seeth?" This, then, is peculiarly a word for days of stress and strain. Hope comes to its brightest shining in the presence of the deepest darkness. The function of hope is conditioned by the prevalence of conditions making for despair. We need not enter into any lengthy consideration of the distinction between faith and hope. Hope is an aspect of faith. According to the Biblical presentation of faith, it will be perfectly safe to say that the soul of man, looking upward in faith, is conscious of perfect confidence; that the soul of man, looking onward in faith, is conscious of hope; that the soul, looking around in faith, is conscious of peace. Faith is an attitude of the soul, hope is the experience which that attitude creates with regard to the future.

The apostolic declaration is made in connection with an argument in the course of which conditions calculated to produce despair were most clearly recognized, and, indeed, described. The whole passage is one in which, in broad statement, the Apostle recognizes those things which persist until this hour: the trouble, the turmoil, the travail, the groaning of the world. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together; ... we ourselves groan within ourselves; ... the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

The way in which hope saves will best be apprehended if we consider, first, the nature of the hope which is referred to by the Apostle; second, the foundation of that hope; and, third, the effects which that hope produces.

If we are to understand the nature of the hope referred to, we must begin by a yet more careful examination of the need for this ministry of hope. It is important that we recognize that it is discovered in the very conditions causing despair. By repetition of the quotations already made in a slightly different language I think we shall discover these conditions. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." "Ourselves also groan within ourselves." "The Spirit Himself maketh intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered."

The first of these declarations was the Apostle's recognition of the fact that the whole problem of pain and suffering, of evil in the widest sense is the problem which constantly assaults the soul of the man of faith in God. It may be well that we remind ourselves that pain presents no problem to any man except to the man who believes in God. Pain becomes a problem only in the presence of faith. When, ever and anon, some believer, it may be one whose faith at the moment is trembling, challenges the world's agony, the challenge is always uttered in the presence of the consciousness of God. When the soul cries out in revolt in the presence of the abounding suffering of men, the cry is always born of the wonder how God can permit this. There is no other problem. Blot God out of His universe and you will still have pain, but no problem to assault the soul. It is only faith that has to face this perplexity. It is Habakkuk who suffers most in the day of the declension of the people of God. It is Habakkuk who says, "Oh, Lord, how long?" I cry murder and Thou dost not hear. I cry violence and there is no answer. What is God doing?

It was Carlyle, rough, rugged, peculiar in many ways, and yet a man of the greatest faith, who, when Froude attempted to comfort him by telling him that God is in His heaven, said, "Yes, but He is doing nothing." I never repeat that without being inclined to say to believing souls, Do not be angry with Carlyle. It was not true, God was doing something, but there is neither man nor woman in this house who has ever come very near, and remained near to the world's agony, who has not had that thought at some time or another. The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain, and the proportion of our nearness to God is the proportion of our sense of this problem of pain, for it is the love of God shed abroad in the heart that renders the heart keen and sensitive to the world's agony. The heart of man, taught by the Divine love, questions the Divine love, until, presently, the heart of the man discovers that the very agony he feels which makes him question is the result of the presence in his soul of the God of love, and, indeed, it is an expression of God's own agony. It is when we become sensible of that prevalent pain that we need hope; and unless hope shall save us, then we shall indeed be lost.

The second state of the apostolic description, "We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, the redemption of our body," is one of the most illuminating sentences on personal Christian experience in all this writing. The Apostle here describes the increasing sense of failure and shortcomings, the cry and the sob that come out of life with intenser meaning as the years go on: "Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" It is the man who comes into the closest association with Christ who also comes to the acutest sense of his own defilement. We groan within ourselves in the baffling defeat of the soul in its attempt to reach the heights; we wait for the redemption of the body, conscious that the tabernacle in which the spirit dwells is the instrument of defilement for the spirit. It is in hours when the under side of our nature wins its victories that we cry out in agony and almost in despair. It is then that we need the gospel of hope.

Then we come to the last and highest word, most mystic and most difficult of interpretation, "The Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." In that word we have a description, not merely of our sense of the general pain of the world, not merely of our sense of our own particular limitations and defeats, but of the Divine discontent which, within the soul of a man, makes him angry and puts him in agony; that knowledge of God which generates restlessness with everything that is unlike Him and unlike His peace; that hot turbulent protest of the soul against every form of wrong and of tyranny, against the conditions that blight and spoil the universe of God. The Spirit Who knoweth the deep things of God, the profound emotions of the Divine heart, touches the heart and spirit of a man with the selfsame feelings until the man himself rises unconsciously to a plane of prayer on which he expresses to God the things which God Himself is feeling.

Now, it is this sense of the world's pain, of our own pain, this sense of anger and agony born of our communion with God, that makes hope necessary. These are the things that fill the heart with despair.

What, then, is the hope? This, again, is a most necessary question for consideration, for if it be true that we are saved by hope, it is equally true that men are lost by hope. Unless the hope be true it destroys. The will-of-the-wisp creates a hope in the heart of the wanderer over the marshes, but it destroys him because it is not a true light. The lights lit by the wreckers along the Cornish shore in the olden days created hope in the heart of many a mariner, but they destroyed. And so, unless hope be true, it will not save, it will destroy.

The Bishop of Durham, Dr. Moule, in his "Commentary on Romans" in the Expositors' Bible, has suggested a translation of this text which is certainly illuminative. What he suggests is a fair implication of the text. He suggests that, instead of "We were saved by hope," we render here, "It is as to our hope that we were saved," as if the text should mean that we are saved as Christian men by hope because of the nature of the hope that is presented to us. What, then, is the Christian hope? If we go over these passages again, we shall find that in every case the hope is declared. What is our hope for creation? That it shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the children of God. That is one of the greatest sentences in all the writings of the Apostle. It presents a vision of the whole creation, ultimately led out from the bondage or corruption, of that which disintegrates, spoils, mars, ruins, into the liberty of the children of God. A doctrine of the world is involved in that statement, and it is the Biblical doctrine, the doctrine of the cosmos as under the dominion of man. The cosmos is seen suffering pain and tribulation, because its lord and master, man, has lost his scepter and his power to govern. That same cosmos will come at last to the realization of all its beauty and all its glory, because the children of God, men and women after the Divine image and likeness, and fulfilling the Divine relationship, will govern it, so that the creation will realize itself and pass out of corruption into full and complete realization.

The feeling of the poets helps us here. There lay the dead sea mew, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning sang,

Our human touch did on him pass,

And with our touch, our agony.

It was the symbol of the whole creation groaning and travailing together in pain.

Thomas Blake, the father of our Nature poetry, sang:

A robin redbreast in a cage

Puts all heaven in a rage;

A dog starved at his master's gate

Predicts the ruin of the State.

Superlative language, you say. The superlatives of earth are the positives of eternity. At last there will be no starved dog anywhere, no caged robin, no mauled sea mew, nothing left in creation which results from the misgovernment of men. Creation will escape its corruption and enter into the liberty of the glory of the sons of God.

We groan within ourselves, waiting - for what? The adoption, the redemption of the body, the ultimate mastering of the body that it may become the fitting instrument of the spirit. Or as Paul put it when writing to the Philippians of his personal experiences: He "shall fashion a new body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory."

Concerning that groaning of the spirit, that restlessness of God interpreted to the soul and creating the agony and the power of prayer, what is our hope? The ultimate rest and joy of God in His completed work, which, perhaps, we most clearly express when we quote the prophecy and the promise concerning the Messiah Himself, that at last He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

What are the foundations of this hope? Inclusively, we may say that our hope is set on God, and that through the unveilings of Himself and of His activity which have been granted to us in Christ. To say that is to say everything. God is our hope in the presence of the problem of pain. Our fellowship with Him has created the problem. Who is God? What is God doing? Is God doing anything? Does God care? These are all questions arising out of faith in God. Blot God out of the heavens, blot God out of the intellectual concept, say there is no God! What then? Ah! but our faith has created our problem, and we shall not solve our problem by denying the God Who created our problem. We have seen a universe in which pain is a wrong, but we should not have seen that if we had not seen God. Therefore, inquiring still more deeply, turning the soul back upon itself, facing the problem, we affirm that the very ultimate ground of hope is God, and that the unveiling of Himself which He has given us in Christ is the very inspiration of hope. It is out of that unveiling that hope comes back to us.

Let us inquire a little more particularly about the aspects of these unveilings which inspire hope. And, again, we will confine ourselves to this very passage, for in it the very foundations of hope are laid bare. I base my hope, first on the suffering of God, on the fact that the Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered; second, on the suffering of the saints, that they, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, suffer; and, finally, on the suffering of creation itself. In regard to the creation, the Apostle has linked another word to the word "groaning": "Groaneth and travaileth." It is the word that suggests birth rather than death. This is the wondrous alchemy of Christianity: pain is the ground of confidence that pain will end.

The first ground of hope is that of the suffering of God."The Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." "He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit." "The Spirit searcheth the deep things of God." When we speak here of the Spirit we are thinking of God, and included in the thought is that of infinite wisdom, infinite love, infinite power. God, infinite in wisdom, therefore making no mistake; infinite in love, therefore never failing in love, for "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds"; infinite in power, therefore able to do all that wisdom reveals and love dictates.

The revelation that is given to us of God in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is that He is conscious of this agony and is active in the midst of it. He, being the sum total of all things, and being more than all the things in which pain is to be found, has gathered the whole within Himself and knows it to its depths. When I look next on the problem of the suffering of the innocent with the guilty, let me remember I am looking on the problem of God's suffering. I admit that this is a problem, a profounder problem than anything London presents, or Europe presents, or the world presents. The problem of a suffering God is indeed profound! But there is a solution. It is the solution of a loving God expressing Himself in a thousand ways in every generation if men had but eyes to see, and ears to hear, and hearts to understand; expressing Himself assuredly in the suffering of every innocent soul that consents to suffering on behalf of the guilty; expressing Himself centrally, and this in some senses finally, in the Cross! You talk to me of the problem of evil in London. I take you to the Cross. There it is focused. You talk to me of the problem of those who suffer. It is centralized in the Cross. You talk to me of the problem of evil, evil winning, evil crushing good, evil mauling that which is high and noble. I take you to the Cross. There it is, in its vulgar tragedy, focused, centralized, made vulgar, as it is vulgar!

In that unveiling God has revealed the fact that wherever there is suffering, there is He also. He, the infinitely wise and loving and powerful, is conscious and active in the midst of all suffering.

On that I build my palace of hope. I stand in the midst of the world's agony, and I say this is also the Divine agony, and therefore my heart believes that at last, how, I cannot tell, by what methods, I do not know, but at last the very creation will be delivered from its corruption and find its way into the glory of the liberty of the children of that God Who has not absented Himself from human sorrow, but Who remains within it, gathering its most poignant power into His own being, and vicariously suffering in the midst of the universe blighted by sin.

If I pass from that wider outlook and look again at the saints, I build my hope on their suffering far more than on their rejoicing, for in their pain they are sharers of the Divine pain, making up that which is behind in the suffering of Christ, and having fellowship with His suffering. They are also sharers of the Divine power and of the Divine patience.

Who are the saints? Take any one Christian man or woman in the life of this city, or far away on the mission field; take an isolated case for the illumination of the general fact. What is this man? What is this woman? This is humanity reborn and regained for God. To use the word of Jesus, this individual is the seed of the Kingdom. New born souls constitute in earth's soil the seed of the coming Kingdom. Then I hear the word of the Lord spoken on another occasion, and I link it to this declaration: "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone." By the suffering of the saints the Kingdom is to come.

This is very well as a general statement. Its particular and personal application must be reserved for loneliness. Let us get away presently, somewhere quite alone, those of us who are suffering in the cause of the Kingdom, or in fellowship with the Kingdom, or as the result of our loyalty to the Kingdom. Does there seem to be no connection between such suffering and the Kingdom? It is false seeming, for by that suffering, by that pain, by that anguish, we are in fellowship with God; and by that fellowship in pain the victory is to be won and the Kingdom is to come.

So with the whole creation. I remind you again in a passing sentence only of the suggestiveness of the word, "groaneth and travaileth together in pain." It is the word of birth pangs! The sobbing of creation, its sigh and its agony, are the declaration of its rebirth. "Behold, I make all things new," is the perpetual word of God. He makes all things new by the way of travail. Thus our hope is born of the transmutation of the causes of our despair.

What are the effects of this hope? I will speak of two only, one named in the immediate context, and one named by the Apostle John. The effects are patience and purity. "We with patience wait." "He that hath his hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." What is patience? Patience is simply remaining under. Remaining under in order to bear. To attempt to withdraw is to leave God. If I am to be in co-operation with God in the processes that are to lead to the final restoration, I must stay in the midst, I must remain under; fellowship with God in service is patience, remaining under, not merely to bear but to lift. To save the life is to lose it, because to withhold the life from pouring out is to exclude God, Who is ever pouring Himself out in sacrifice. The mental experience of such fellowship is patience with God, patience with ourselves, patience with creation.

Patience means staying underneath, in fellowship with God, because of the assurance, not that at last I shall climb the height, but that at last He will perfect that which concerneth me.

The second effect of this hope is that of purity. "Everyone that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." At your leisure, contrast the passage in John with the one in Romans, and see how close the thoughts lie to each other. Creation is waiting for the revealing of the sons of God, and we who are the children groan within ourselves waiting for the adoption, the redemption of the body, and the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. So run the thoughts of Romans. Then I turn to John, and I read, "Beloved, now are we the children of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be, for He is not yet manifested." There has been no manifestation yet of this sonship of God in all its finality and its glory and its beauty. But we know that when He shall be manifested as He is, we shall be like Him. Paul says that creation is waiting for the sons of God. John declares that the Son of God will be manifested with the sons of God. The man who has that hope set on God purifies himself, even as God is pure. The responsibility is that of purification, the type of purity is that of the purity of God.

If that were all, I hardly dare read the passage. Is there power for such purification? The Apostle goes on to declare that He was manifested to destroy the works of the devil.

And so, as we are conscious of the sorrows of the world, the perils threatening us in our home life, the perils of our prosperity, the persistence of pain everywhere, the failure and disappointment verging on despair, we are saved by hope! Our hope is built on Him Who is our God. Our hope, therefore, is based also on the very sense of defeat and despair and pain that cause our agony; for by these things men live, by these defeats they climb to the higher heights, by these bruisings and these batterings of the iron life is molded and shaped to the Divine purpose. The only man who has no hope is the man who has no God.

But that must not be the last note. The last note must be this: God is our abiding hope, and by hope we are saved.