**VOLUME 8; CHAPTER 07 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**A GOOD FRIDAY MEDITATION by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*The fellowship of His sufferings.*

*Philippians 3:10*

WE ARE GATHERED HERE THIS MORNING NOT SO MUCH TO observe a day as to take advantage of it. This is a day which affords us one of those opportunities, all too rare, for the display of our oneness with the whole Catholic Church of our Lord. The purpose of our assembly is pre-eminently that of meditation in the presence of the Cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

By the selection of this one brief phrase from the writings of Paul we take the highest level of consideration possible to us in these days of our probation and our waiting for the full manifestation of grace in the Advent of glory, that level of consideration, namely, which is occupied with the subject of the fellowship of the saints in the suffering of the Saviour.

It is quite evident that these words describe what Paul himself considered to be one of the highest possible phases of experience of Christian men and women during this period. He immediately continued, and declared that he had not yet attained, had not yet apprehended, all the fulness of his Lord's purpose for him when his Lord apprehended him; and if we read to the end of this very wonderful biographical chapter in the letter to the Philippians we find that Paul did not think it was possible for us to enter into the ultimate experience of Christianity until the very body of our humiliation should be changed and fashioned according to the body of Christ's glory? For the present, for the "little while" of this earthly, limited, straitened life, the Apostle evidently considered that in this passage he had revealed his estimate of the highest experience.

This experience he described in a threefold way. The consuming passion of his heart was, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings." That is a description of Christian experience on an ascending scale. First, "That I may know Him"; second, and therefore, "That I may know … the power of His resurrection"; third, and consequently, "That I may know … the fellowship of His sufferings."

The words immediately following reveal the condition on which the believer may enter into this threefold experience, "Becoming conformed unto His dying." Thus, in this strange and yet wonderful unveiling of Christian experience, the Cross is seen at the commencement and at the culmination. "By becoming conformed unto His dying," I know Him; and by such knowledge of Himself, I know the power of His resurrection operating in and through me; and by such knowledge of the power of His resurrection, I come back again to the Cross, not now merely for conformity to it in order that I from it may derive benefit, but rather for that highest, holiest, most mysterious experience, that I may have fellowship with His sufferings.

Notice, further, that in this description of Christian experience Paul places this fellowship in suffering last, because it is last in the experimental order; it is the final experience of the saint in this world; it is the largest, deepest, highest, broadest.

Surely, we also have to say about this that we have not yet attained, we have not yet apprehended. Gleams of the infinite and mysterious glory have we seen; passing experience of the deep, the profound, the sorrowful mystery have we known; but, oh, to know Him so that we may also know the power of His resurrection, so that we may also enter into the true, abiding fellowship of His sufferings!

For this threefold experience the Apostle had counted all things as refuse, and had resolutely turned his back on every ambition, hope, and aspiration. We may well, then, in quietness and solemnity attempt to meditate on the sacred matter.

What, then, are the sufferings of Christ in which we may have fellowship? Such an inquiry necessitates a declaration which in some senses need hardly be made, for we are all convinced of its truth, that the central, supreme, mysterious values, quantities, qualities - I know not the true word - of the sufferings of Christ we can never share. At last He trod the winepress alone, the darkness into which He passed was such as no other has ever known. It is quite alone, this Cross of Christ, if our eyes can see the central Person, for He was not merely the Man of Nazareth, He was God in Christ, quite alone by reason of the infinite reaches of it, for the Cross, so far as our calculation can carry us, is far older than creation - "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Through all this strange, perplexing history which we find in the ancient Scriptures the principle is found: ever and anon high, noble souls, by heroic abandonment to the vision, were permitted to enter into some measure of sympathy and fellowship with the central mystery. Abraham on the mountain, offering his firstborn, was brought nearer to understanding the God Who "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" than he could have been in any other way. Isaiah exercised a great ministry, part of the meaning of which is voiced, in the paragraphs found in the fifty-third chapter of his prophecy. The cry of Isaiah's heart was, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Yet out of that very personal experience he rose to a higher height, portraying the picture of One in Whom all sorrows should meet and center and find their fulfilment, and through Whom all light should break on the darkness of human nature.

All the way we find the Cross, and all the way we may discover some measure of fellowship with it by those who saw the vision and yielded themselves to the will of God. All the way also there were great deeps and heights and mysteries eluding those watchers and toilers and warriors. Now for two millenniums men have gathered about the Cross; saints and scholars have attempted to interpret its meaning to us; and here we gather again today, and still we have to say, It is too deep for us, too high for us. Neither theologian nor philosopher has ever yet been able to penetrate to the heart of the mystery and unveil before the eyes of men its deep processes. Therefore we once more adopt the simple and sublime language of the Bible, "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body upon the tree." There is nothing to be added to that; no final explanation of it is possible; it baffles theology, for it is too great for theology. In the vastness of it I hide; there I find rest amid the conflict with evil, within and without; and there, at last, when the sun goes westering and I pass o'er the line, I shall find my refuge, singing on the way,

Nothing in my hands I bring,

Simply to Thy Cross I cling.

I can have no share in the Cross, in all its profoundest meanings, save as I take from it the benefit that heals and helps and renews hope within my heart.

In what sense, then, is it possible for us to have fellowship with the suffering of our Lord? Reverently I want to suggest to you some of the things that have come to my own heart in meditating on this great matter. I must at once say that I am most conscious that I cannot exhaust even this aspect of the Cross, and there may be those of you who have known this Master of mine longer than I have, or in a briefer period have come to know Him better than I, who perchance may know the meaning of these words far better than I. Such will, I know, be patient while I attempt to interpret what I have seen of the possibility and speak of some of the things in which it is given to us to have fellowship with Christ in His suffering.

The first possibility which I see is that it is given to the saints to have fellowship with Christ in the sense of sin. This is possible only to those who have a very keen sense of the perfection and beauty of the Divine will. It is possible only to those who are living in close conformity to the ideal which Christ has revealed, in the power of the life which Christ has communicated. Of the way into the secret I will speak again; I want to speak now merely of the experience itself. I think I may venture to affirm that our Lord always suffered in the presence of sin. Wherever He saw sin, He suffered. It is given to us to have fellowship with Him in that suffering. It seems to me this morning - I speak now for myself and for none but myself - that I can interpret the thought that is in my heart only by turning my statement round and making it negative. Is it not true that familiarity with sin tends to breed contempt for sin? After all is said and done, the most callous men and women are those living nearest to sin. How easy it is to see sin, and to see it so often, and to look on it so constantly, even though we ourselves may be delivered from its power and may not be yielding to its seduction, that it ceases to make any appeal in our heart, and ceases to produce any suffering in our soul! That is the perpetual peril of familiarity with sin. If I go back and look at these pictures of the life of the Lord and watch Him reverently, I believe that whenever He looked on sinning men sin caused Him suffering. In the suffering, there was ever the mingling elements of love and of anger. Sin forevermore caused pain to the heart of the Lord because sin was the violation of the Divine order, something spoiling the Divine purpose, interfering with all the highest of the Divine conceptions. The measure in which it is difficult for us to understand this is the measure in which we fail to have fellowship with our Lord. I am almost loath to take any illustration, yet suffer me one: how a discord hurts the man of music, how disproportion wounds the artistic temperament. It is a very low level of illustration, but it is an illustration on the level of the mental. If it be possible to climb by way of it to the plane of higher spiritual conception, then we see at once that our Lord, not merely in the final, supreme hour of the Cross, but in all those days in Nazareth, in public ministry, suffered in the presence of sin. Every discord hurt His soul, all lack of proportion touched Him to the very quick of His high, holy, sensitive spiritual nature. Sin hurt, sin filled the heart of the Christ of God with pain. Not merely the cruel bloody Cross, but all that made that Cross possible in the ruin of the race and necessary for the redemption of the race gave Him pain.

We have fellowship in His suffering when sin, wherever it is manifest, brings pain to the heart. It was no idle thing that our fathers and mothers said to us when we were children, though we could hardly believe it, that our wrong-doing hurt them. It was true. When you and I have true fellowship with Christ, then when our eyes rest on a man, a woman, bruised, broken, smirched, soiled by sin, we suffer in the presence of sin. Paganism at its highest gathers its garment about it and holds sin in loathing and contempt; Christianity lays its robe aside and endures the agony in order to save the sinner. That is fellowship with Christ's sufferings.

That leads us to that which is closely connected with it, which is indeed but another phase of the experience. We may have fellowship with Christ's sufferings in the presence of man's misunderstanding of God, He knew God, and, knowing God perfectly, He suffered as everywhere He saw God misinterpreted because misunderstood. In speech which to this day scorches and burns His hot anger proceeded against men who misinterpreted God to the multitudes.

Fellowship with Him in this is possible only to such as live in the love of God. Misunderstanding too often embitters, and so ceases to cause pain; and this is almost invariably so when the misunderstanding is of ourselves. That is a very low level of illustration, from which we resolutely turn, Our Master suffered because God was misunderstood. Do we? How much do we know of pain when we take up some brilliant magazine article that libels God, that reveals the writer's absolute inability to interpret One he does not know. It is perpetual sorrow to the saint living in fellowship with Christ that God is not known, is misunderstood and misinterpreted. How much do we know of this fellowship with God which issues in fellowship with the suffering of our Lord? I apologize for my illustrations, because I recognize that no illustrations can reach the high level of the great theme we are attempting to consider. How we suffer if our friend, whom we thoroughly know and understand, is misunderstood! How we burn with indignation when something is said that libels our friend! Do we ever feel angry with an anger that grows out of a great agony when God is libeled, when God is misunderstood, when God is misinterpreted? Such pain comes out of only the closest fellowship with Christ. We cannot force the experience.

One other note, and only one. We can have fellowship with Christ in His pity for human failure. Sin in itself causes Him to suffer. The misunderstanding of God causes Him pain. But there is something beyond this, while yet related to it. I look at my Lord through life and in death, and am almost overwhelmed by the fact that He suffered in the presence of human failure, and suffered in sympathy even with the punishment that was inevitable. If I quote old and familiar words I do so because they recur naturally. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." The awful word must be pronounced. There is no weakness in God. No violation of holiness can be permitted. "Desolate," He said, but as He said it His voice was choked with tears. That was not His will for Jerusalem. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth - that is the dream of God for Jerusalem. "Desolate" is Jerusalem's choice, and it broke Christ's heart. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." "Consider Him that hath endured such gainsaying of sinners" - the old version translated, "against Himself"; the new version translates, "against themselves." When my eyes first lighted on the change I was startled and I thought I had lost something. He "endured such gainsaying of sinners against Himself"; it was a great picture, that of the Lord enduring man's attitude of hostility toward Himself. But look again: endured the gainsaying of sinners against themselves; their attitude toward Him was rebounding against themselves; their waywardness was making for their own destruction. That is what Christ endured. That was the deepest note of His suffering, the suffering of pity for human failure. A great prophetic word, uttered long ago, declared that judgment is "His strange act," necessary in the interest of love and holiness and in order to establish the universal kingdom of peace, but strange. I shall have come into some true measure of fellowship with Christ's suffering when I speak of a lost soul, not as though I rejoice, but with a breaking heart. Robert William Dale said to me when I was beginning my ministry, I have known one man who as an evangelist had the right to speak of a man being lost, and that man was D. L. Moody, because he never could do it except in tears. That is fellowship with the suffering of Christ.

We may, we ought to have, perpetual fellowship with Him in these aspects of His suffering. Sin always ought to make us suffer. I do not mean sin in our own lives merely, but sin in other lives. These streets of our city, these multitudes of fallen human beings sinning - we ought to carry the sorrow of it all perpetually on our hearts. The fact that our God is being misunderstood and misinterpreted should rest forevermore as a grief on our souls. There should be in all the declarations of the counsels of God that are vibrant with terror something of the infinite pity and sorrow of the heart of Christ, Who even while denouncing the doomed city expressed Himself in sorrow and in tears.

How is it possible to know this fellowship? We can come into fellowship with Christ in suffering only through the power of His resurrection. The sense of the Master's suffering comes only when His own life is regnant in the life of the saint. It is Christ in me that fills me with compassion. I know it to be true. I cannot - God forgive me if the confession is an unworthy one - produce within myself any pity for some sinning men; but the measure in which my Lord lives in me, masters my life, dominates me, the measure in which I dare yield myself to the impulses of His indwelling, is the measure in which I cannot look upon sinning men without suffering and desiring to help. The beauty of His life amazes and shames me as I watch Him in Judea, Galilee, and Perea; but when by the way of the Cross it is liberated, illuminating my intelligence, firing my emotion, bending my will, then I live one life with Christ and have fellowship in his suffering. The man who here wrote about the fellowship of His sufferings is the man who also wrote, "I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake." Commentators, expositors, and exegetes who declare that Paul did not mean that do not know Paul, and they do not know Christ. When Christ has full possession of the life, then out of the tides of His life, His risen life, surging through the life of the saint proceeds the passionate cry, I would I could be accursed from Christ for the deliverance of these others. By the power of His resurrection, and by that alone, can I know the fellowship of His sufferings.

Before it, yet hardly before it, for it is so intimately related to it, that we cannot omit it, is the phrase, "That I may know Him." The first movement of the resurrection life of Christ in the soul is the consciousness of Christ, and it is when I know Him that I know the world without; and to know Him makes me know the truth about sinning, suffering men and women. First, the knowledge of Christ, then the consciousness of the power of His resurrection in the opened vision, and the inspired emotion, and the driving will. Then I move into the great realm of fellowship with His suffering. He suffers in me, through me, for I have become part of the mystic body of Christ. He Himself is the Head, in Whom all pain is focused, but I may be part of the throbbing nerve system that has fellowship with that central pain. It is by the way of knowledge of Him and of the power of His resurrection that I can pass into fellowship with His suffering.

That leads me to the phrase just beyond my text to which I have already referred, "becoming conformed unto His death." There we really begin. Until we are conformable unto His death we cannot know Him, we cannot know the power of His resurrection, we cannot know the fellowship of His sufferings. What is it to be made conformable to His death? The whole chapter from which our text is taken gives the answer by illustration. Paul said, "I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for Whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse." What things? All the sinful pleasures of this world? Nay, they were out of sight! What things? All the things he had counted gain. What were they? Pride of birth, of religion, and of ethical attainment. All high and noble things until he had a vision of Christ, but then the things in which he had boasted, blood, religion, and ethical attainment, were dross, refuse. He gave himself entirely to the Christ, dying to all that lay behind. That is the way to know Christ. Christ is never known until He alone is desired. The highway to the upper levels of the Christ-life is the low way of the Cross, wherein we die to everything else. That is what hinders so many of us. We sing:

Were the whole realm of nature mine …

Are you ever afraid that you are committing blasphemy as you sing it?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,

That were an offering far too small:

Love so amazing, so divine,

Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Yet we still cling to ambition and to high ideals which, in the deep sub-consciousness of our religious thinking, make us imagine that we are not quite dependent on Christ or His Cross. To know Him everything else must be counted as refuse.

This is, it seems to me, the highest level on which it is possible for us to consider the sufferings of Christ. There is a contemplation of the lonely sufferings of Christ, the results of which we receive by grace, which is perfectly right, but which may be terribly wrong. If we gather to gaze on that Cross only to know the benefits conferred on us, only to gather them into our own souls, only to spend right, high, holy, spiritual things on our own small needs, then, after all, is not that the blasphemy of all blasphemies? Can I dare to be selfish in the presence of that Cross? If I dare, am I not sinning the sin of all sins the most deadly and most dastardly? Is it not necessary that while I come empty-handed and God fills my hand with blessings, while I come to the Cross and receive the infinite benefit of His Cross, I should understand that my full hands are but symbols of my responsibility to press closer still to Him, in order that through me there may be made up that which is behind in the suffering of the Lord?

Yet my last word is this. Do not miss the blessedness of the fact that the fellowship of His sufferings means that He has fellowship with us. When I enter into the fellowship of His sufferings I am not alone, for He is forever with me. I can endure no pain for Him that He does not share with me. When I stand in the presence of sin and suffer - if I have climbed high enough, in that moment He is with me, He is feeling the same pain, He is suffering with me. When my heart is moved with hot anger because God is misunderstood, He is suffering with me. My fellowship with Him means His fellowship with me. When through pity born of His love my heart breaks over the awful punishment that is falling on the head of the sinner, never let Satan suggest I have reached a higher level than the Lord, for He is having fellowship with me, my pity is born of His pity, and His love is suffering with my love.

Paradox of Christianity which no man can explain - there is no joy like the fellowship of His suffering! What is the sense of sin that causes you pain, dear child of God? It is the outcome of purity. The measure of purity is the measure of suffering in the presence of sin. In the infinite mystery of pain there is the deeper heart and core of holy joy. What is that suffering of your heart in the presence of misunderstanding of God? It is born of your perfect satisfaction in God. Why are you angry when that man libels God? Because you know Him. Your hot pain and great sorrow come out of the quiet rest of intimate knowledge. What is that pity for the sinner that throbs through your soul, fills your eyes, breaks your heart? It is the outcome of the love of God shed abroad in your heart.

Oh, verily, if we can but come to the Cross now, and in its presence "… lay in dust life's glory dead," then, indeed "from the ground there blosoms red, life that shall endless be."