**VOLUME 8; CHAPTER 08 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**AN EASTER MEDITATION by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*

*1 Peter 1:3*

THESE ARE THE FIRST DIRECT WORDS OF THIS LETTER OF Peter, following, as they do, immediately on the salutation. They constitute an outburst of praise. Undoubtedly, this letter was written by Peter in obedience to his Lord's injunction, "Do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren." He wrote "to the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia," and he wrote for the one purpose of strengthening them in the midst of severe trial and great difficulty. The letter thus intended to strengthen opens with this great doxology. One can understand how these words of Peter came from a very full heart. They are distinctly autobiographical. While expressed in that plural number which associated all the saints with himself, those to whom he wrote as well as those who had been his immediate companions in the early days of discipleship, there can be no escape from the conviction that he was writing very much out of his own experience. They were the words of one who had passed through deep waters because of manifold temptations and severe proof of faith, manifold temptations in the midst of which he had faltered and failed, severe proof of faith in the process of which his courage had failed, though his faith in his Lord personally had never failed. They were the words of a man who had passed through these experiences and had proved his Lord's power to deliver. They were words written, as we have already indicated, to such as were then passing through trial, so that he spoke to them almost immediately of the manifold temptations through which they are passing, and referred to that trial of their faith which was indeed severe, but which had its values and place in perfecting their character.

In a letter from such a man to such people we are at once arrested by the initial outburst of praise: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

In these words we have Peter's own account of what the resurrection of Christ did for him and for the first disciples. That is the narrowest application of the text; but, in proportion as we appreciate it, we shall be prepared for the wider application. I repeat, Peter was writing out of a personal experience. He was thinking of the past, of the first meeting with Jesus, of the mystic and marvelous influence he felt when his Lord looked into his eyes and said to him, "Thou art Simon ... thou shalt be called Rock." He was remembering how, there and then, he yielded himself to the irresistible glamor of that personality and went blunderingly but courageously after Jesus. He was remembering all the days that followed, the weeks and the months, the wonders and the teachings, the dreams, the revelations, and the aspirations; he was remembering the gathering of the shadows, and the darkness that settled on him, and the dull despair, and then that strange and mystic light which broke on his astonished spirit when - we know not where or when - his Lord, having risen from the dead, found him all alone and talked to him. In that hour, he now declared, we were born again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Here again we may consider Peter, as indeed we constantly have to do, as the representative man. Interpreting his declaration that he was begotten again unto a living hope by his experience as it is revealed to us in the gospel stories, we may consider in what sense this was true. Such a meditation will serve to reveal to us the true value of that glorious event which we celebrate this morning, the resurrection of our Lord.

We shall consider, then, first, Peter's experience of Christ before resurrection; and, second, the difference which the resurrection made.

First, the experience before the resurrection. We will confine our attention to the man who wrote this letter, Peter, looking upon him as a representative man. We need not dwell on the earlier incidents to which I have already made reference, but only on those of the later months of our Lord's ministry, the incidents occurring in that last, mysterious, shadowed portion of the time.

In the earliest days and months of our Lord's ministry He was the center of attraction to all sorts and conditions of men. We cannot but have observed in our reading of these gospel narratives that there was a very strange sifting process which went on from the beginning of that public ministry: gradually men and women who had been irresistibly attracted to Him withdrew from Him. Indeed, I should almost be prepared to say that they were driven away from Him by the very severity of His terms and the strange and almost appalling manner in which He repelled them. Our theme is not that of the attractive, or the repelling power of Jesus, but it is important that we remind ourselves of it. At the commencement of His public ministry multitudes crowded after Him; at the close of His life's mission not a single man stood by His side. The tragedy is ultimately expressed in words that always flame with fire when we read them, "They all forsook Him and fled," for these words refer to His own disciples. The course of the ministry was one of attraction and sifting as within the infinite wisdom of God; it was part of the Divine economy. In the course of our study of the life of the Lord we become impressed with the fact that in about two and a half years this hostility became very patent, criticism became more definite, men were evidently plotting to silence His voice, to take His life. They are seen working against Him, spreading the net, in order to capture and destroy Him.

Let us listen to three things that Peter said in that shadowed period, for in those three things I think we shall be brought face to face with his experience of his Lord. As the result of all the training, all the teaching, and all the gracious ministry of the years, he said three things, not to be undervalued, but for the moment simply to be observed. Without staying to turn to the actual passages, which are amongst the most familiar in the New Testament, let me refer to them and group them.

The first is recorded in the Gospel of John. We have the account of a certain hour of criticism, in the midst of which our Lord delivered discourses recorded by no other evangelist. In that hour of profound teaching, men drifted away from Him, and at last He asked the disciples, "Would ye also go away?" Then Peter spoke, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." That was Peter's first great confession.

A little further on, so far as one is able to follow these events in chronological order, perhaps three months later, we have that very familiar scene at Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus, having gathered the disciples away from the multitudes, questioned them on the result of His ministry, and at last made the question personal to them: "Who say ye that I am?" In that connection we find Peter's second great confession, "Thou art Messiah, the Son of the living God."

So far as time is concerned, almost immediately following, perhaps within the next few hours, for Matthew carefully links that which follows to the story of the great confession, our Lord began to unveil to these men the method by which He would pass into His Kingdom, and told them of the coming Cross and resurrection. Then Peter looked at Him, and we have now no confession, but a voice full of anguish and anger. We have hardly dared to translate this passage accurately; that may be a somewhat bold thing to say, but those who are familiar with the Greek will agree. To catch the real significance of the word of Peter on this occasion we need to express what he said in the most colloquial language. In effect, he exclaimed in angry protest, God help you, that be far from Thee!

In those three sayings of Peter - all uttered within the space of three months, in the period when the method of ministry of our Lord was changing, and He was moving toward the ultimate passion - his experience of Christ is revealed to me.

First, "Thou hast the words of eternal life." Then, "Thou art the Messiah." Finally, God help you, not that, not the Cross, not suffering! That was as far as Peter went in experience before the resurrection, and it was a long way.

The occasion of the first was that of gathering hostility. There was a deeper tone in the teaching of Christ as He attempted to direct the attention of the crowds from the material miracle to the spiritual suggestiveness, and the very disciples were offended in Him; and of them who had followed Him, "many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." Then came the hour in which Jesus looked at the twelve and said to them, "Would ye also go away?" That is, do you wish to go? He gave them the opportunity to do so. There was in that question a touch full of severity. It was as though He had said, If you wish to go, the way is open. Do you desire to go? Then Peter looked at Him and said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." This was a remarkable reply. Oh to be able to get back into the actual atmosphere! Think of these words for a moment, not from the Christian standpoint, but from the Hebrew, remembering the mental outlook of the man who uttered them. It is only as we do so that we shall understand what he meant. In that word of Peter spoken to Jesus he declared his conviction that the teaching of the Lord was authoritative and life-giving. In other words, in that confession of Peter, I find the declaration of his conviction that in the hands of Jesus were the keys of prophetic ministry, the keys of the true interpretation of the moral order, that His word was final as the law of life. In effect, Peter said at that moment, In Thee we have found the Prophet for Whom we have long been waiting: "Thou hast the words of age-abiding life."

We pass on, a few months perhaps, to the next crisis at Caesarea Philippi, and hear the challenge of Jesus, "Who say ye that I am?" answered by that old and familiar confession, "Thou art the Messiah," for of set purpose I adopt the Hebrew word for interpretation of the Greek word "Christ." Once again, oh, to be back in the actual atmosphere and listen to the words as they came from the lips of Peter. What was it that he really meant? What was the Hebrew idea of Messiahship? It was that of kingship. In the second psalm we find the light of the Old Testament conception focused. The Hebrew was looking for a king to sit on the throne, and administer the affairs of the kingdom in order to realize the great ideal of the Hebrew nation as a nation, to make it the Kingdom of God. Peter looked into the eyes of Jesus and said, "Thou art the Messiah"! I can never quite make up my own mind whether there and then the conviction became final, or whether some little while before he had come to this conviction. I am inclined to think that it was in that moment when he was challenged that all the thinking, all the previous processes of his mind, crystallized into conviction and he said, "Thou art the Messiah," recognizing that Christ held the scepter.

Thus Peter saw Jesus not only as the Prophet for Whom men had long been waiting, speaking the words of ultimate authority; he saw Him also as the King for Whom men had long been waiting, holding in His hand the scepter of perfect government. He had discovered in Jesus the King to Whom all the prophets had given witness. This meant that his heart was full of hope, hope for the establishment of the Kingdom, the realization of the Divine purpose, and the fulfilment of the aspiration of his own people for generations; hope that in the King-Prophet there should be the enunciation of the final, perfect ethic, hope that the Kingdom would now be established.

Immediately we pass to the third word of Peter. The third word was spoken following the two confessions: the confession of Peter of which we have been speaking, and the confession of Jesus answering that of Peter. The confession of Peter was, "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God"; the confession of Jesus was, "I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." In this word of his Master there flamed before the surprised vision of Peter the glory of the established order, and then immediately that deeper secret of the Cross, which Christ had never explicitly mentioned before to His disciples, for the evangelists are very careful to tell us that after this Christ began to show that He must suffer. This secret He had nursed within His own heart; it was the ultimate movement of His mission, the passion, the exodos! Of this He had never until now been able to speak; but "from that time began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up."

It is well to notice in this connection that every passage in the Gospel narratives which records our Lord's foretelling of His death records also His foretelling of His resurrection. This is a matter of supreme importance, because we are sometimes told that this foretelling of death was the result of Christ's yielding to circumstances, that He was so heroic that He would not turn aside from His path although He knew that men would kill Him. That is not the New Testament teaching. The New Testament does not reveal Jesus going to death as a victim, but as a Victor.

After the confession of Peter, then He told the secret for the first time to Peter and the rest of the disciples, that He must die, and that He must rise again. It was then that Peter uttered his passionate word of protest.

The more I ponder these stories, the less I am inclined to criticize Peter, and the more perfectly I come into sympathy with his protest. I do not say that it was right, but that it was perfectly natural. The Church of God still only half believes that the way to crowning is the way of the Cross. There never yet has emerged the Christian nation that is ready to die for the sake of right in the hope of resurrection into new life.

Jesus now looked at this man and said, You have found that I am a Prophet; you have found that I am a King; now let me tell you the secret of how I am going to utter the deepest truth, and of how I am going to build the Kingdom. I must go up to the city, I must be bruised, killed, and rise again. If we put ourselves in the place of Peter we shall understand his protest, made in anguish and anger. There is no escape at all from the fact that Peter was angry. He took Jesus aside, and began to rebuke Him, that is, to chide Him. God help you! That be far from Thee! In that moment his hope was overshadowed. If He was going to Jerusalem to suffer and to die, what about the words of age-abiding life? If the Teacher dies, the words will be dead! In that moment the shadows fell. If we read the story carefully and chronologically so far as we can, we see what happened from that moment until the Cross. Peter never came near to his Lord again. This is true of all the disciples. They followed Him all the way, they were amazed, they dared not ask Him questions. Over and over again we have the account of how He tried to tell them about His Cross, and every time - oh, the tragedy of it, and the wonderful unveiling of human nature there is in it - every time He spoke of His Cross some one of them broke in upon the conversation with practically the same question: Lord, who is the greatest among us? In those final days hope was dying. The disciples never ceased to love Him, never ceased to believe in Him and in His intention; but they lost all hope. Hope died, until at last they could bear it no longer, and they all forsook Him and fled. There at last He hung on the Cross, the brutal Roman gibbet, done to death; and the sun went out of the sky, the light faded from the horizon, and despair surged through their souls, and who can wonder?

And now let us listen to the doxology:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The text tells its own story, but for a moment or two let us meditate on it, that we may discover the difference which the resurrection made. Do not forget the unutterable, immeasurable, unfathomable darkness of those days and nights, especially to these men - the Prophet dead, therefore the, teaching impracticable; the King dead, therefore the Kingdom impossible.

Then came the strange news of the morning: "Certain women … came saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that He was alive" - l never read that without feeling that these men did not quite believe the story, because the women had told them! Then somewhere, somewhen - I am always thankful there is no record of the where or the when - Jesus found this very man Peter. When the two arrived from Emmaus eager to tell the assembled disciples that Jesus had walked and talked with them, before they could tell the story, the eleven told theirs, and this was what they had to tell: "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." When, or where we do not know. When he was massing the evidences of the resurrection of Jesus, Paul referred to it, but neither he nor the Evangelist gives any details. This is one of the sacred, powerful silences of the New Testament. Somewhere the Lord met Peter. It would be almost sacrilegious to paint the scene, yet I feel that I could paint the picture of that meeting. At least, in this doxology we find the effect produced on Peter:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

It was the dawning of a new day in the rebirth of hope. The resurrection began its work at the point where this man had broken down. He had discovered the Prophet; the King had been revealed to him: Prophet? yes! King? yes! Priest? no! That he had not understood. He had seen the keys of moral interpretation in the hand of Christ and had said, Thou art a Prophet. He had seen the scepter and had said, Thou art a King. But he did not understand the wearing of the ephod, he did not apprehend the need of the Priest. The Cross had filled him with fear. In that moment when he saw the risen Christ, the first effect was on his conception of the Cross; the Cross was transfigured before his eyes! He had seen the hand holding the scroll, and the brow on which rested the crown; but now he saw, not first the King, not first the Prophet, but first the Priest wearing the ephod.

We are all familiar with Watts' great hymn:

When I survey the wondrous Cross.

In it there is a verse which is generally omitted from our hymn books today, why I do not know. It reads thus:

His dying crimson like a robe

Spreads o'er His body on the tree,

And I am dead to all the globe,

And all the globe is dead to me.

Why have we cut that verse out of our hymnbooks? If it is the sign of a theological movement, that movement was not born in heaven.

His dying crimson like a robe

Spreads o'er His body on the tree.

That is the robe of priesthood. Peter now looked at the Cross through the resurrection light; and the Cross that had shamed him, that had filled him with fear, flashed and gleamed with the splendor of mercy: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to his great mercy …"

The Cross was now seen as the propitiatory, the place of priesthood; there was the altar, the sacrifice, and the priest; there sin was dealt with. Before Peter was far on with this letter, he wrote: "Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ."

Go back to the other side of Resurrection and stand with Peter. Death? God help you, no! That is murder and defeat! Come to this Resurrection side and look back. The Cross is no less vulgar - the vulgarity of the Cross is the vulgarity of the sin that erected it - but the Cross flames with light. The light of the glory of the grace of God, who took sin into His own heart and canceled it in a mystery of pain that can be expressed in human history only by blood-shedding, is shining from the Tree! The Cross is transfigured: "Who according to His great mercy begat us again into a living hope." By the way of that Cross the Evangel of forgiveness, which is the moral basis of the Kingdom, is made possible. The word of the prophet is the law of the Kingdom; the scepter of the King is the government of the Kingdom; but the Kingdom is a lost Kingdom, despoiled territory, a people in rebellion. How can it be restored? Only by building on a moral basis, by reconstruction, regeneration, repentance, renewal - all great Christian words born of the fact of the Cross. In the morning after the resurrection, when the Lord sought him, Peter saw in the transfigured Cross the first gleam of hope, the hope that had perished when the Cross was erected, and he was begotten again unto a living hope. Hope springs from the Cross, it begins the flush of a new morning, it inspires the anthem of the ultimate victory, it composes the song of undying hope.

In the Cross Peter saw the throne established, and he saw the King, still holding the scepter in His hand, and knew that authority was vested in Him. Presently Peter heard Christ say, "All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and disciple the nations," and by the witness of Resurrection Peter knew that in the King were vested all resources of power for the establishment of the Kingdom. When the risen Lord spoke to him that morning, Peter heard the final word of revelation. He had seen the keys in Christ's hand before; but now the truth was perfectly published. Thus the hope-restoring vision was, first, that of the Priest; second, that of the King; third, that of the Prophet enunciating the laws of the Kingdom, and every word full of force and power and life because of the victory won in the midst of the mystery of the darkness of the Cross.

Take away the resurrection, and what then? It is surely a work of supererogation to argue it in this assembly. Deny the fact which we celebrate today, what then? Then the Cross was the ultimate tragedy. If Christ was murdered and there was nothing in His death other than the victory of sin, then that is the severest reflection on the government of God of which I know anything; no other moral problem compares with it. If there was no resurrection, then that was of all tragedies the most tragic! No resurrection! Then that King with high vision, noble aspiration, is dead! No resurrection! Then the Prophet was mistaken when He said, "Fear not them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do," mistaken in all His high ideals! Then where am I? "If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching in vain, your faith also is vain … ye are yet in your sins."

It is altogether too late for arguments of that kind. The results demonstrate the resurrection. Spiritual and moral reconstruction by the way of the Cross, the fact that men have seen, and still do see, sin when they come to the Cross, and confess it when they kneel before the Cross, and know the breaking of its power when they yield themselves to the Christ of the Cross, these are the facts that prove the resurrection.

The King is alive and known, exercising His will in the hearts of individuals, creating magnificent heroisms today, so that men are venturing forth in obedience to Him on high and holy enterprises, counting not their lives dear unto them, that they may be obedient to His will. The prophet is vindicated in the growing victories of His teaching.

Our hope is living, for these things are the result of the resurrection, they demonstrate the resurrection.

If for a while we are in the midst of conflict, and the noise of battle is about us, we know the victory is already won. Armageddon was fought in the hour of the Cross, the prince of this world hath been judged, and at last the victory shall be complete.

So that, with this song of hope in our heart, we also, born to a living hope by the way of the resurrection, trust in the Priest, follow the King, and obey the Prophet until His Kingdom shall come.