**VOLUME 8; CHAPTER 10 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE PRIESTLY BENEDICTION by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise shall ye bless the children of Israel; ye shall say unto them,*

*The Lord bless thee, and keep thee;*

*The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;*

*The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.*

*So shall they put My name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.*

*Numbers 6:22-27*

The Lord bless thee, and keep thee;

The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;

The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

THESE WORDS CONSTITUTED THE PRIESTLY BENEDICTION IN the Hebrew economy. They were included in the Divinely appointed liturgy of worship, and, in common with the whole of that pictorial system, were richer and fuller than the men who used them knew. It is only in the "grace and truth" which "came by Jesus Christ" that we can discover the full meaning of "the law" which was "given by Moses." Nevertheless, as the component colors of light are seen in the spectrum, so we may often be helped an understanding of grace and truth by the ritual and formulas of the law.

The priestly office is mediatorial. Its function is twofold, intercessory and benedictory. Each of these functions has a double operation. The priest in intercession stands first in the presence of God pleading the cause of men, and then in the presence of men pleading the cause of God. The priest in benediction stands first in the presence of men pronouncing blessings from God, and then in the presence of God offering the praises of men.

Our present meditation is concerned with the first aspect of the benedictory functions, the pronouncement of the Di vine blessing on men by the lips of the mediating priest. This solemn act was a distinct part of the worship of the Hebrew people, and its place in the order of our worship is indicated quite clearly in the twenty-second verse of the ninth chapter of Leviticus, where we read these words: "And Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people, and blessed them; and he came down from offering the sin offering, and the burnt offering, and the peace offerings." Thus it will be seen that in that liturgical service the pronouncement of the benediction followed the completion of the presentation of the offerings. The relation between the suggestiveness of these offerings and the pronunciation of the blessing is quite evident. Sin being dealt with, the priest may say: "Jehovah bless thee and keep thee." Dedication being now complete, he may say: "Jehovah make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee." Peace being thus established, he may say: "Jehovah lift up His face upon thee, and give thee peace."

Without any discussion of the mediatorial ministry of our one and only Priest - the Daysman Who stands between us and God, laying His hand on God with the awful, holy familiarity of unity, and laying His hand on us with the equally surprising beneficent familiarity of unity - the work that makes the blessing possible, let us quietly meditate on this ancient formula of benediction as it reveals to us the inestimable advantages of our relation to God in Christ Jesus. In doing so we desire to observe that the whole fact of the advantage is included in the suggestiveness of the Name, while its component parts are revealed in the threefold form of pronouncement.

When this commandment was given to Moses it ended with this injunction: "So shall they put My Name upon the children of Israel." It was an instruction how the priest was to pronounce the Name of God in the hearing of the people, so that they might understand the advantages that came to them from God through priesthood as they were inclusively suggested in the name itself.

The Lord bless thee, and keep thee;

The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;

The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

So shall they put My Name upon the children of Israel.

If I may fall back upon the figure already incidentally used, the Name is "light"; but, by the pronouncement of the Name in this fashion, light is analyzed and we see its component parts; and the colors that, merging into whiteness, become light are revealed for us in this ancient formula.

Thus let us consider first the revealing Name; and, second, the interpretative sentences.

Now may it be given to us by the guidance of the. Spirit of God to approach this subject of the Name as here found, with all solemnity and with all reverence. We shall take time to remind ourselves of some things with which perhaps we are very familiar, but which are so vital to our subject that we must deal with them. We of the Christian age are at least in danger of losing something because of our holy familiarity with God through Christ Jesus. He has made it possible for us to talk with Him, all of us, as Moses did, face to face, as a man talks with his friend. By reason of this privilege I often feel that we use the holy Name somewhat carelessly. Reverence for that name characterized the Hebrew mental attitude. This reverence presently became pedantic obscurantism, and prevented these men from uttering it, and made them refuse to write it. At a later period, some translators substituted another title for the name in many passages, so that in our common reading of the Old Testament we are in danger of missing its revelations. To us the name is Jehovah, or, if some of you have been reading modern theological books, you have seen it spelt Yahweh, which is purely a piece of pedantry, because no one can prove that Yahweh is more correct than Jehovah. It never appeared on the Hebrew manuscript in one form or the other; but in the very appearance of the name was revealed that reverence to which I am making reference. To express it they used the tetragrammaton, YHVH. These four consonants stood on the page, the vowel points being omitted that the name might not be uttered, so great and sacred did it seem to be to these people. This particular name came to have greater sanctity to the Hebrew people than even the name Elohim, which is vaster and more wonderful than the former in its essential meaning.

It was used from patriarchal times without any clear apprehension of its meaning, but from the hour of the Exodus it was used with a new understanding of its meaning. Such I take to be the meaning of the word which I have already read to you in the book of Exodus, in which after communing with the great lawgiver, Jehovah is recorded as having said to him, "I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as El Shaddai, but by My name Jehovah I was not known to them." The Patriarchs had employed the Name, were familiar with it, but had not understood it. In the hour of ransom and redemption God began to explain the name by which they had named Him, but which they had never perfectly understood.

What, then, was the suggestiveness of the name? The name "Jehovah" does not stand as the symbol of essential being; the one name which stands as the symbol of essential being is that by which God revealed Himself to Moses in the presence of the burning bush. When fear and trembling possessed the soul of the man called to high enterprise, he inquired of God, Who shall I say has sent me? and the answer of God was this, "I AM THAT I AM." "I AM" - as though He were about to declare some truth concerning Himself, but suddenly limited Himself - "THAT I AM," in order that the listening man might understand that God was not giving him an interpretation of nature or character, but an affirmation of being. God is eternal "I AM." How often in the course of casual, necessary conversation I say, "I am," and yet, as a matter of fact, I have no sooner uttered the word than my tense has become a past. In some true sense, no finite being can say I am. It is the distinct word of essential life, abiding, timeless, dateless, infinite. That is essential being, but that is not the suggestion of the word Jehovah.

Neither does the word Jehovah declare all-completeness or sufficiency of essential being. That is found in the word "EI Shaddai," God all-sufficient. In our versions it is translated God Almighty, but El Shaddai, God all-sufficient, is a word including not merely the thought of might, but the thought of wisdom, the thought of all resource; it describes God as the fount of all being and all manifestations, the last, final, ultimate fact out of which everything has proceeded, and of which everything in some form or fashion or sense, is an exhibition, a revelation. Jehovah does not mean that.

Jehovah is a part of the verb which is made use of when essential being is declared; but it suggests, not the being of God, but the adaptation of His being to some necessity, or - and I cannot find any better word, imperfect though it may be - the becoming of God, that He is One Who becomes; not the all-sufficiency of God, but that all-sufficiency is active on behalf of others; not that there is infinite fulness in the sea of Deity, but that the sea flows in and fills the gaps wherever they may be.

Already men had named the Name, already they had entered into the privilege of the fact, already the men of faith had found God becoming to them what they needed. Once the father of the faithful, in language of infinite suggestiveness, broke out into exposition of the word, perhaps hardly understanding the magnificence of his exclamation. In the supreme hour when he offered Isaac in sacrifice, the offering being complete in will, the ram was caught in the thicket, and Abraham said, "Jehovah Jireh," the Becoming One sees and provides, the Becoming One becomes that which necessity demands. But now, with ransom and redemption, the constitution of the nation, and the establishment of the prophetic and pictorial ritual, the name is to be interpreted, unveiled.

Then I take up my Bible, and my eye runs over the panoramic movement, and the story, through hours of faithfulness and hours of failure, is that of God becoming what His people need: fiery judgment in the hour of their unutterable folly, great compassion in the hour of repentance, a mighty fortress when the billows broke upon them; the land of magnificent distances when the heart was weary and tired; always becoming, until, at last, in the fulness of time the great truth sang itself out in the mystic wonder which can find no finer expression in human language than that of the seer of blue Galilee, who, when he would write the story of the central fact in human history, wrote it thus: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God … And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth." That is, God becoming flesh, that through the veil of the flesh Divine might break forth the light that else were too bright for the feebleness of the sinner's sight. Not the I am of essential being, not El Shaddai of infinite, all-sufficient resource; but the I am that bends, bows, stoops and becomes, the infinite unapproachable glory as of a million suns, stooping as a sunbeam to kiss the face of a sick child, the becoming One, fulness of glory, fulness of grace.

We need no longer be afraid of the name. He took the infinite mystery of the name which Hebrew bards and prophets dared not write, and spelt it out in yet simpler speech, and the I am of God become flesh is Jesus. It was a commonplace name when He bore it. I have no hesitation in saying that even in Nazareth scores of boys were called Jesus, for it is but the Greek form of the familiar Hebrew Joshua. The great high priest in the day of restoration was named Joshua, the great successor of Moses, who led the people from the wilderness into the land, was named Joshua. For him the name was made. Hoshea was the name of the boy whose father's name was Nun; but when he entered on his work his name was changed to Joshua, the merging of the name of God with the fact of salvation, so that it means Jehovah, a Saviour. At last the angel said to Joseph, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for it is He that shall save His people from their sins."

When I turn to the other writings in the New Testament I find that, with reverence, He is named "the Lord Jesus Christ;" "Jesus Christ the Lord." Beyond the gospel narratives He was hardly ever called Jesus, except in two great writings, the epistle to the Hebrews, and the Apocalypse of the seer of Patmos. The writer of the letter perpetually called Him Jesus, and John, when writing of those wondrous visions, spoke of Him as Jesus. In these two writings we find, in some senses, the most resplendent revelations of His personality. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews introduced Him by declaring Him to be the very effulgence of the Divine glory. John gave us a matchless vision of Him.

Thus the name, suggestive, full of glory, was at last sounded in human history in the simplest of all names, Jesus, and the whole meaning of the name is that God incomprehensible makes Himself comprehensible, the Eternal and All-sufficient, bends and bows Himself into such form and fashion and method that humanity may be touched without being crushed, may be touched so as to be healed and helped.

Salvation in His name there is;

Salvation from sin, death and hell,

Salvation into glorious bliss,

How great salvation, who can tell?

But all He hath for mine I claim,

I dare believe in Jesu's name.

Reverently, let us turn from the inclusive suggestiveness of the Name to these interpretative sentences of the benediction:

The Lord bless thee, and keep thee;

The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;

The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

It is one name, but pronounced in such a way as to suggest three aspects of the blessing for which it stands.

Take the first, "Jehovah bless thee, and keep thee." Here the thought is that of God as the Source of blessing; it is fixed, not so much on the blessing itself, which is not described, not so much on the keeping itself, which is not described, as on the fact that blessing and keeping alike are from God. The terms are general. "Bless thee," that is, quite literally, kneel to thee, in order to serve thee. The Lord kneel to thee, and kneel in the attitude of service! I know how daring the statement seems to be, how amazing it is. Once again, for illumination, the mind travels from the ancient mystery of the priestly formula of benediction to a simple picture of the New Testament. A group of men are gathered in an upper room, shadows are about them, darkness is already on them, and there is the One Who bears the name of Jesus, girding Himself with a towel as a servant and kneeling to wash the feet of these men. "Jehovah bless thee," kneel to thee in order to serve thee! "And keep thee," that is, hedge thee round about so as to protect thee.

If the terms are general, the ideas are of the fullest, suggesting the bestowment of all benefits, and the warding off of all opposing forces. When Paul came to writing the ultimate document of his system of teaching, the Ephesian letter, he opened it with a doxology, "Blessed be the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing." When he approached the culmination of the same letter he introduced us to the realm of conflict, and makes us conscious of the opposing forces: "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness." What now will he say to us? Stand "in the strength of His might." Thus the essential idea of the Name is expressed in these statements in certain respects. The Becoming One becomes all that is needed in order to reach His people in blessing, to hedge them round about, and protect them from their foes.

In that first movement of the great benediction I find the reason of my faith, the ground of my hope, and the inspiration of my love; for therein I am reminded that the source of all benefit that my soul most needs is Jehovah Himself.

Let us pass to the second phase of benediction. "Jehovah make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee." Here the thought is still that of Jehovah Himself, not as the source of all blessing only, but also as the channel of blessing. The terms are now relative. "Jehovah make His face to shine upon thee." This is not the same idea as that expressed in the words, "Jehovah lift up His face upon thee." The Hebrew word translated "face" and "countenance" is exactly the same. The difference is not between "face" and "countenance," but between making the face shine, and lifting it up, upon. The thought here is of Jehovah as a channel of blessing. The terms, as we have said, are relative; the face luminous upon thee, Jehovah gracious unto thee. The ideas are the ideas of activity: Cause His face to be luminous; be gracious unto thee, that is, stoop in active kindness unto thee. "Jehovah bless thee, and keep thee" means that all benefit and protection come from God; but "Jehovah make His face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee" means that the blessing will come, not as a gift separated from Jehovah, but by and through the very coming of Jehovah. It is His face that is to be lifted; it is His grace that is to come to men in their need.

When I turn to the New Testament for the fulfilment of the suggestiveness I find it in another writing already referred to. How will He make His face shine upon men? The writer of the letter to the Hebrews declared that in Jesus was the effulgence of the Divine glory.

Then "Jehovah be gracious unto thee." How is this fulfilled? I turn to the close of the selfsame letter, and I find that the writer declared that the One Whose face was the effulgence of the Divine glory, that very One, passed beyond the camp to suffer and to die, in order to bring grace to men who are lepers, outcasts, failures. That is the supreme fact of Christianity. It is not merely that Jehovah is the source from Whom all benefits come, or that He keeps men who in themselves are what they ought to be, but who under some evil mastery would fail. It is also true that Jehovah lifts the light of His face upon men who have lost the sense of His nearness. Jehovah follows the man who has left communion and fellowship, and in some great mystery of suffering, cancels the leprosy and takes the man back to Himself. Thus Jehovah in His Son is revealed; His face became luminous through Jesus; and in the graciousness of His stoop He redeems. In Jehovah the Son we have the clear shining of the face of God, and eyesight for eyes that were blind.

If in the first aspect I find the reason of faith, the ground of hope, and the great inspiration of love; in this I have the argument for the reason of my faith. The reason is that God Himself is the source of all my help; the argument that demonstrates the reason is that God became flesh, and so the glory of His face was seen, and the wonder of His grace became operative. In the same way, this is the proof of the ground of my hope, and this the whisper of the word that becomes the inspiration of my love.

So we move one stage further to the final unveiling. "Jehovah lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." Here the thought is no longer that of Jehovah as the resource of blessing, or as a channel of blessing; it is rather that of Jehovah as the experience of blessing in the soul of a man, of Jehovah Himself creating a new experience.

Here the terms are final. The luminous face of God is not luminous merely, but it is lifted, so that it shines upon the soul; not merely is He gracious toward me, but this with a grace that fills my heart with peace which He gives, which He conveys, by His own immediate presence.

The ideas are supremely pictorial. The uplifted face suggests perpetual day. The peace is that of abiding quietness and unruffled calm possessing the soul. If I would find the New Testament fulfilment of the suggestiveness of the ancient Hebrew benediction, I turn to the words of Jesus, in His last discourses to His own disciples. I find Him saying, I am going from you, but I will send you another Comforter, and then immediately explaining that statement as He adds, I come to you. God, by His Spirit, so comes as to create within the soul the experience of day. Yet again He says, I will send you the Comforter, and in connection with that declaration the gracious words pass His lips, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you," so that it becomes your peace, My peace is your peace. Our experience is that of perpetual day, for He, the Son of Effulgent Divine glory, is always with us; our experience is that of unruffled calm and peace, because His peace is ours. Thus Jehovah, by His Spirit, causes the shining of His face in Jesus, creating perfect day for man; and by His Spirit He causes His word, His revelation, His teaching, His message to become comfort to the soul so that it has abiding peace.

By the ministry of the Spirit blessing becomes more than a word spoken, more than argument in proof of the word spoken; it becomes experience, so that man living in the communion of the Holy Ghost lives in the daylight of the uplifted face of God, effulgent in the face of Jesus, and in the place of unruffled calm and perfect peace.

When these priestly words were committed to Aaron and his sons, they were to pronounce them in obedience, not understanding all their significance; yet within them, as the holy Name was thus placed on the separated people, there was the suggestiveness of the infinite mystery of the Trinity. Jehovah the Source of all blessing, bless thee and keep thee. That is the love of God. "Jehovah make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee." That is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Jehovah lift up His countenance upon thee," so that the light becomes sunrise and day, and give thee peace. That is the communion of the Holy Ghost. These are the aspects of the one inclusive blessing that comes to humanity through the priesthood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This blessing and this keeping, this irradiating of the face of God and this gracious activity of God, this lifting of the face so that sunlight lights up the pathway, and this communication of peace, which makes panic impossible - these blessings come to men only through Jehovah, and the final test of priesthood is the ability to pronounce that benediction.

These blessings can be pronounced in their fulness and with authority and power only by the lips of Jesus. The ultimate wonder and amazement is that He has made us a kingdom of priests. Our business is to pronounce this benediction on men wherever we go. It is not the business of the preacher merely, but of all saints, so that from this hour of worship, if there be any value in it, we shall pass back to our homes, back to the city, back to the place of need and toil and sorrow and sin, saying as we go:

"The Lord bless thee, and keep thee;

The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;

The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

This is the function of the priesthood of the Church; and the words become dynamic in human history and human life when they are incarnate.

Let us, then, seek the holy shrine, let us worship at the altar, let us come to the place of mediation that He may speak to us the benediction, and that in order that we may pass out into the highways and the byways, amid the darkness and restlessness and bondage of humanity, fulfilling the high-priestly function as we bring to men this sense of God, this power of God, this gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.