**VOLUME 8; CHAPTER 17 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**DANIEL, A MAN OF EXCELLENT SPIRIT by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Then this Daniel was distinguished above the presidents and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him, and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.*

*Daniel 6:3*

THE STORY OF DANIEL IS VERY OLD AND FASCINATING. ALL who had the advantage of godly training, and that supremest advantage in the life of a child, a mother who told Bible stories in the early days, remember how they loved the story of Daniel. I believe that as I read it for our lesson, in the heart of every hearer, there came again the consciousness of the old fascination and the old interest. The story of Daniel is fascinating because it reveals the possibilities of godliness in the midst of the circumstances of ungodliness. Daniel and his friends in that age long ago, were loyal to God even in the land of their captors, and amid all the enticements of the court. In such circumstances perhaps the subtlest of all temptations assail the man of faith. It is so much easier to float with the stream than to stem it. The principle of accommodation appeals so strongly to that lurking desire for ease which is one of the sure evidences of the fall of the human race that it needs very definite courage to resist, to be godly amid ungodliness, to take a definite and positive stand for principle where everything seems to be against principle.

The key to Daniel's splendid fidelity may be found in the statement of my text, repeated in other parts of the book, "an excellent spirit was in him." This statement literally means that in Daniel spirit predominated, was uppermost, was enthroned. We are accustomed to use the word "excellent" with other values and intentions, all of which may be right in certain connections. For instance, we say that "excellent" means fine, noble, admirable; and we are justified in thus defining it; but the etymology of the word has another signification. Excellent is something that excels, goes beyond, predominates, and the word translated "excellent" in our text carries exactly that meaning. We may with perfect accuracy read our text thus - it would not be rhythmic or admirable as a translation, but at least it would be accurate - "A spirit that excelled was in him," a spirit that projected was in him. Not flesh, but spirit was the chief thing. This is evident at the very beginning of the story of Daniel. To him, it was not the king's dainties or wine from the king's table that were the principal things, but rectitude, which means life harmonizing with the infinite, the true, the eternal. The principal thing in Daniel was not the physical, though he was fair, ruddy and splendid; spirit was the dominant factor in the personality of this man. Daniel was not a man who thought of himself within the physical as possessing a spirit; he thought of himself within the spiritual as possessing a body. "An excellent spirit was in him." He was a man who began life in the spiritual, and from that center governed the material. He was not a man who began life in the material, and from that circumference crushed and bruised and killed the spiritual. In other words, Daniel was a man proportioned after the pattern and ideal of God. In himself, and in all his relationships, he recognized that the supreme quantity, the supreme quality, was spirit. He was "a man of an excellent spirit."

Let us, then, examine the qualities of spirit manifested in the life story of the man in whom spirit excelled and was the principal thing. I want to say four things about Daniel as revealing what life is, where spirit excels, is dominant, is enthroned. This man of excellent spirit, in whom spirit excels, was, first, a man of purpose; second, a man of prayer; third, a man of perception; and, finally, a man of power. The first two things tell the cause; the second two describe the effect. The cause, or inspiration, of all this man's life story is found in the fact that he was a man of purpose and a man of prayer, and the effect is seen in the fact that he was a man of perception and a man of power. Purpose and prayer, these are the words that indicate our responsibility. Perception and power, these are the words which indicate what will follow in some way in the life of every man in whom spirit is dominant, and who, therefore, is a man of purpose and a man of prayer.

Daniel was a man of purpose. "Daniel purposed in his heart that he would-not defile himself with the king's meat." Notice carefully what this means. Purpose is at the beginning of everything. Directly after finding himself in a place of peril "he purposed in his heart." This is the matter of supreme importance. Thousands of men drift into evil courses for lack of a definite and positive committal of themselves to some position, for lack of having purpose, something settled in their hearts. To delay in the moment of the first consciousness of perilous surroundings is to compromise presently, and, unless we are very careful, it is finally to apostatize. Daniel speaks to us today in no uncertain tone, and the message he utters at the very beginning is:

Dare to be a Daniel,

Dare to stand alone,

Dare to have a purpose firm,

Dare to make it known!

That may be doggerel, but it is philosophy - the deepest secret of life for every young man or woman. I would to God that I could impress that thought on all young people! Purpose in a man's life is all-important. It affords him anchorage in the time of storm, creates for him a base in the day of battle. To have committed oneself to some definite thing is always of value in every walk of life. When a man has formed his purpose he is halfway to victory. That is so with a boy who is looking forward to his life work. When he knows what his purpose is, he is halfway to victory. He is not all the way to victory. It is quite possible to have formed that purpose, yet never to reach the goal; but it is equally certain that the goal cannot be reached without purpose. The first thing for a man to do is to define the inner and deepest thing in his life. Underlying his life somewhere, every man has a purpose in the Divine economy. Daniel found it, named it, announced it, stood by it. It is quite impossible for a man to live without a purpose of some sort. Purpose lies at the back of will, and purpose operates through all activity. Some men have a score of purposes, but never one named, defined, announced, to which they are committed. In matters political, social, in all departments of human life, it is the man who has some definite purpose who is likely to arrive somewhere. I am sorely tempted to use an Americanism. I will. It is the man who has a purpose who gets there! As in the smaller, weaker, lower things of life, it is true a man needs a purpose definite and announced; so also it is true supremely in matters of the spirit, in things of Christian life and service,

Daniel's purpose was a very simple one, and yet it was sublime: simple in its expression, sublime in its great underlying principle. What was the simple purpose announced as he came down into the midst of the Chaldean court and its corruption? I will not touch the king's dainties; I will not drink the king's wine! That is the simplicity of the purpose, but not the sublimity of it. What underlay it? "He purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's dainties nor with the wine which he drank." He purposed in his heart that his spirit was the supreme thing. He would not permit fleshly indulgence of any sort to rub the bloom from spiritual life, to weaken the nerve of spiritual endeavor, to dim the vision of spiritual outlook. He purposed that he would not defile himself; he was a man of excellent spirit, offspring of God, kin of the eternal, child and heir of the in- finite; and he said, "My purpose is not to defile myself." Purpose found expression in his case in refusing the things that were likely to weaken the tabernacle of his flesh, and so defile the indwelling spirit which was himself. Daniel's deepest purpose was loyalty to God, expressed in separation from the corrupting influences of his position. Because he stood there at the beginning, he was strong and victorious through all the coming days.

My brothers, I urge on you the importance of having a purpose and declaring it, of committing yourselves absolutely and positively, not merely in the sanctuary, but everywhere and always, to some clearly defined position. Today, amid the allurements and enticements of a godless age, let every man purpose in his heart that he will be loyal to Jesus Christ. That is the sufficient purpose for all life today. You and I live in a much easier age than Daniel lived in, with forces at our disposal far more potent than had Daniel. This age may be more complex in its temptations, more subtle and insidious in the way it is likely to spoil men, but it is also an age in which true life is become possible because of the simplification of the purpose. The simplicity of the purpose for each of us is that we commit ourselves to Christ. I am His avowedly; His confessedly; I will follow Him. That is the first and the simple purpose to which I invite every man. Remember that this purpose of loyalty to Christ, formed in the heart, confessed with the lips, is simply the center from which a man is to correct everything else in his life. For Daniel the deepest purpose of all was loyalty to the God of his fathers, and the expressed purpose was his refusal to touch the things that were likely to corrupt that loyalty to God - likely, therefore, to defile him. That was but the beginning of things - the king's wine and the king's meat. There would hardly be a day that Daniel would not have to defend his position and declare his loyalty to God. Some of the youths had to affirm their purpose when Nebuchadnezzar set up his image. The purpose was the same in every case.

I am a little afraid lest I make this thing look complex when I want to make it simple. Purpose loyalty to Christ, affirm it; and then from that center you may begin to construct your circumference and set the externalities of your life right. I meet scores of men who say, I try, but I fail. I want to be a Christian, but this or the other thing stands in my way. I reply, You are not to do these things in order to become Christian; you are to become Christian in order to be able to do these things. Do not attempt to construct your circumference in order to be in right relationship with your center. Find your center in order to correct your circumference. We have not forgotten how impossible it is to form a circumference until we have found the center. It is said that Giotto could make a perfectly round O. Well, he was the only man who could ever do it, and (forgive the skepticism of this) I have never seen one he made. But I am perfectly sure in the moral realm, in the life you and I have to live, we shall never make the circumference of life true and beautiful until we have found the center. The first thing is that the man has a purpose in his heart, and that purpose, to crown Jesus Christ. I will begin there, and then, if the king's meat and the king's wine are likely to interfere with my loyalty, I am to refuse and stand upon this central purpose of life.

Daniel was also a man of prayer. Nothing stands out more clearly than this fact. When the interpretation of the king's dream was asked, Daniel called his friends together into a compact of prayer, asked them to pray with him, that he might have the necessary light for interpretation. As the story moves on, it reveals the truth that he was a man who had regular habits of prayer, who three times a day turned his face toward old Jerusalem, thought on God, spoke to God. Here we touch the secret that underlay his fulfilment of purpose. Strong purpose is powerful in execution only as we are dependent on God. The heart may be firmly determined on loyalty, but unless we know how to lean hard on God the forces against us will prove too much for us. A man meaning to do right and depending on God is absolutely invincible. If the purpose has been formed in the heart, what next? Be men of prayer. What lies beyond the fact of a man's praying? First, his sense of personal limitation; second, his profound conviction of Divine sufficiency. What is prayer with these things lying in the background? It is the use of the means of communication between a man's weakness and God's power, between man's limitation and God's sufficiency.

If we desire to live this life in which spirit excels, the life of victory and of power, it is not enough to have purpose. You and I must recognize our limitations, frailties, weaknesses, In the days of our young manhood we feel so self-sufficient. When the eye is bright, the step elastic, the will buoyant, we think we can do the high thing, the noble thing, in our own strength. Oh that God may reveal to us at once that this is not so, that sooner or later, the godless life is always a failure and a wreck! Was there ever a man of stronger personality or individuality, apart from Christ, than Saul of Tarsus? Yet he confessed, "When I would do good, evil is present with me." He declared that though he willed, purposed, the high and the true, in execution he stooped to the low and the false. That is not the story of his high Christian experience, but the story of what he was apart from Jesus Christ. It is the story of every man who has not learned the deep secret of prayer. His own limitation, the fact that the forces of evil about him are too many for him, is one of the deepest and most important lessons any man can learn. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

Side by side with this there needs to be the set conviction of the strength and the sufficiency of God in every human life. Let me put this in the very simplest way so that it may be helpful to some of you. The lot is cast in this great city. Centered in London is every pernicious thing that is likely to blast young life. You have come up to this city, some of you with the great advantages of godly parentage and home training, and some of you have the greater advantage of having been born in the city and so of being familiar from childhood with its allurements and its vices. Be that as it may, sooner or later, unless you learn the secret of dependence on God, you will be wrecked and ruined on one side or other of your nature. I shall never tell you that all you have to do is to realize your own manhood, and fight the battle and conquer. I am here to tell you that evil is too strong for you, that the forces that lure are the forces that ruin. In your own strength you cannot overcome. If that were all I would be silent. But there is another truth, the truth that Daniel knew, the truth that God and Daniel were stronger in combination than all Chaldean corruption and idolatrous evil, the truth that you and God in London are invincible against all the forces that will sweep against you.

Doubtless I speak to some who have fallen, who have sinned, and they know it. I take you back to the point of your fall, and tell you that your fall was due to your independence. Had you been a dependent soul, trusting in God, recognizing His power, communicating with Him by prayer, always leaning hard on Him, you would have won where you failed. Yet how often young men say, I have failed and I could not help it. That is partly true and largely untrue. Even if you have purposed solemnly in your heart you will be loyal to Christ, you cannot help failure if you are attempting to fight the battle in your own strength. But if you and I know what it is to trust in God's sufficiency, and to pray, there is no temptation we may not overcome, no advance of the evil one that we may not repulse. Man dependent on God is absolutely invincible. Evil cannot master me if I have attached myself to the infinite resources of God, and if that attachment is maintained by the prayer life. Form habits of prayer. Daniel prayed with his face toward Jerusalem every day. I urge you to have special times, special seasons; I urge you to continue in prayer.

But there is another word about prayer. When Jesus swept away the Temple at Jerusalem, He made all the earth a temple for the true worshiper, and not merely in this house or in your own private Bethel, not merely at the appointed moment, but wherever you are, with the eye unclosed and the word unuttered, you can pray. The Puritan fathers talked very much about ejaculatory prayer. I pray God that we may form the habit of it. Realize that when peril confronts you, without waiting for time or place, in the midst of your daily vocation, you can pray; and in the moment of such praying the answer of prayer is with you. The great word of the Hebrew epistle is, "We may find grace to help us in time of need." At the back of that phrase we have a Greek phrase, which we can safely translate by an English phrase with which we are all familiar: "Find grace to help in the nick of time," Right there, when peril threatens, there I may have grace to help. The strong man in London is not the man who says to Jesus in the morning, I will not forsake Thee today, and then goes out to fight his battle alone; he is the strong man who says to his Master in the morning, Lord, lead me today lest I fall, and then prays in the city, in the office, in the warehouse, in the most subtle place of peril, that of loneliness. Everywhere grace to help awaits the cry of the praying soul. Purpose first, and prayer perpetually.

Then follow the two results I have mentioned. First is a spirit of perception. There is no doubt that the gift of interpretation which Daniel received was especially bestowed by God for special purposes. The immediate application to us is that to the man who has made his purpose and prays will be given a clarity of vision which will enable him to accomplish the Divine work allotted to him. It may be, as in the case of Daniel, that of interpretation, or it may be in some other form. The thing of importance is that the man who has purpose and prays will be of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord. Have you not felt that you need spiritual perception to discern between right and wrong, and that quickly? How often a man says, "I did it before I knew it; I fell before I was conscious of the temptation." But to the man of purpose and prayer come a growing keenness of insight, sensitiveness of soul, quickness of perception in the commonplaces, and a keen vision in the crises of life. Special illumination from God flashing on the pathway saves him in the moment of his peril. Habits have to be formed, whether they are good or evil, and on the basis of purpose and of prayer a habit of quick understanding of the will of God in matters of life and conduct and a keen insight in the subtleties of temptation come to a man.

Finally, Daniel was a man of power, first, as we have seen, in small things, but also in great things. I am not suggesting that if you take this position of purpose and maintain it, take this life of prayer and follow it, that if you have this quick, keen perception of God by the Holy Spirit, you will come to a place of wordly power. It certainly is remarkable that this man held office in three kingdoms - Babylon, Media, and Persia. The man of purpose, the man of prayer, the man of perception, was recognized by the men of his age and trusted, and put into places of power, and, as the text says, "the king thought to set him over the whole realm." I am not saying that this kind of promotion will necessarily follow in every case; but I am saying that the man of purpose, of prayer, of perception, becomes the man of power - power that enables him to say no. It is a very old story (some of you are tired of hearing it - it was told you in Sunday school) the story which says that the man who can say no is the strong man. It is still true. Sometimes it takes more courage to say no than to lead an army. The highest courage is not the courage of the battlefield; it is moral courage, the power to say no. I am not giving you an ethical lecture and advising you to say no. I am here to say to you: Be a man of purpose, of prayer, and you will be able to say no. What nerves a man to say no in the presence of temptation is the fact that he has taken his stand and is a man of purpose, is a man of perpetual prayer, and, therefore, a man of perception, seeing the issues, understanding the virtues, and able to say no when the moment comes. Our age wants men who are superior to it, not men who are driven by it. Men who are superior to the age are men in whom spirit excels, men in whom spirit has its anchorage in purpose, its source of strength in prayer, its ability to lead in perception, its consequent power in all departments of life.

My last word shall be as my first. For the Christian man the principle has been focused in a Person, so that true purpose is loyalty to Christ, true prayer is communion with Christ along the pathway of life, true perception is submission to Christ and the answering illumination of the Holy Spirit, true power is co-operation with Christ in the commonplaces and crises of all the days. I pray for you, my brothers, as I pray for myself, that we may be men of excellent spirit, men in Whom spirit is crowned, enthroned; and that we may cultivate purpose and prayer so that we may find what it is to be men of perception and power. The age waits for such men, and wherever they are to be found the result will be that others also will be led into true life.