**VOLUME 8; CHAPTER 23 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**WINNING SOULS by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*He that is wise winneth souls.*

*Proverbs 11:30*

THE SLIGHT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE AUTHORIZED VERSION and the Revised Version in the translation of this text suggests two different meanings. The Authorized Version reads, "He that winneth souls is wise," and that seems to mean quite simply that it is a wise thing to win souls. The Revised Version reads, "He that is wise winneth souls," and that seems to mean quite as simply that the condition for winning souls is wisdom; winning souls is a wise business; a man must be wise if he is to win souls. When the two ideas are thus suggested we realize that each translation may convey both meanings. The Authorized Version declares, "He that winneth souls is wise," that is, in himself and in his deed. The Revised Version reads, "He that is wise winneth souls," that is, wisdom is the condition for the work, and when that condition is fulfilled, the winning of souls is the inevitable issue. I feel, therefore, that we are justified in treating this text in both ways, as conveying both ideas. Whichever translation we take, whichever idea may appeal most strongly, we recognize that one subject is suggested, that of winning souls, whatever the declaration with regard to it may be. The declaration we shall treat as twofold; first, that wisdom is necessary to the work, and, second, that the accomplishment of the work is demonstration of wisdom.

Let these be the lines of our consideration: first, the subject referred to, winning souls; second, the wisdom which is necessary to do the work; and, third, the wisdom of the work done.

First, then, as to the winning of souls. The phrase is an old one. I do not mean merely by the fact of its presence in the Divine oracles, but by the fact of its use. I think we are compelled to admit that we do not hear so much about it now as some of us did in our boyhood days; but it is still being used, and is by no means unfamiliar to Christian people. Herein lies a difficulty, not insuperable, but quite definite; the difficulty of familiarity with a phrase, and the consequent difficulty of prejudice as to what the phrase may really mean. Here, therefore, we must clear our ground, or we may be lead into false speculations and certainly into misunderstandings of the enterprise which is suggested by this phrase of the Old Testament, a phrase illuminated, transfigured, and glorified by all the revelation contained in the New Testament.

What, then, is meant by winning souls? To proceed carefully with our investigation brings us immediately to another question, What are souls? When we have answered that, we may proceed to inquire, What is it to win them?

What, then, are souls? We have no right to take the word as it is in common use today and read into it either the interpretation of that common use, or the interpretation of our own conception of its meaning. We want to know what this man meant when he wrote the word. What did he mean by "souls"? I can answer the question only by looking carefully at the word and seeing its place in these Old Testament Scriptures. Let me immediately say, it is one of the commonest words to be found in these writings. Someone who has had the time to count tells us that the Hebrew word occurs 754 times in the writings of the Old Testament. Of those 754 times, the word is translated "souls" 472 times; on 282 occasions the Hebrew word is translated in forty ways, so that altogether the same Hebrew word is translated in forty-one ways. The predominating translation, however, is the one that we find in our text. If, then, this word was thus variously translated, and evidently as variously used, it is important that we discover its real intention. The word means simply a breathing creature. Its first occurrence, interestingly enough, is in the twenty-first verse of the first chapter of Genesis, which says that "God created the great sea-monsters, and every living creature that moveth," living creature meaning breathing creature. As I take my way through the Bible and observe its use, I discover that it became almost constantly and exclusively used of man himself. To take this Hebrew word nephesh, and trace it through the Old Testament and tabulate the results carefully, is to have a remarkable aid to the study of the psychology and theology of the ancient Hebrew people. It is used over and over again of man as a person, of man as a being whose existence is due to the fact of life. Thus the word does not refer to the spirit of a man alone, it does not refer to the mind of man only, and it certainly does not refer to the body of man alone; but the word in its common use excludes neither body nor mind, nor that which is essential, spirit; it includes all of them. "He that is wise winneth souls." Here the word "souls" does not mean the spiritual side of man's nature only, or the mental capacities of a man alone; certainly not his bodily powers only. It means the whole man, and man is not a disembodied spirit. The essential in man is spirit, but no man is man in his spiritual nature alone. This old-time writer, having much less of light and less understanding of the value of human life, and less understanding of God's estimate of the grandeur and glory of human life than we have to-day, said, "He that is wise winneth *men*" - using the word generically.

Now we may ask our second question, What is it to win men? Here again the word employed arrests us. I like the word "winneth" and yet there is a sense in which while certainly valuable as it reveals the best method of doing the work, it is not quite accurate as a revelation of the thought of the writer. "Winneth" is a very beautiful word, for it is by the note that woos and wins that men are most often helped; but the Hebrew word here is to take, to catch, and that in the widest variety of applications. Here again a little illumination may come to us if we remind ourselves of how this word is rendered in our versions. It is translated elsewhere, to accept, to bring, to buy, to draw, to infold. I would not be at all afraid of taking any one of these words and putting it into my text. He that is wise accepteth souls. He that is wise bringeth souls. He that is wise buyeth souls. He that is wise draweth souls. He that is wise infoldeth souls. That suggests all sorts of methods for doing the work, and every word seems to have some of the music of the gospel of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and some revelation of the beauty of His methods with men. But the simple meaning is, to take alive. We may get some New Testament light on this in the story of the miraculous draught of fishes (Luke 5:1-11). Jesus said to Peter on that occasion, "From henceforth thou shalt catch men." That is exactly the thought of my text. "He that is wise catcheth men." Looking at the story in Luke again, I am constrained to say that our translation misses something. What did Jesus really say to Peter? "From henceforth thou shalt catch men alive." The value of what Jesus said did not consist in the similarity of the work these men were called to do, but in the disparity between the work they had been doing and what they would do henceforth. Henceforth you shall catch men alive. They had toiled all night and had not taken anything. Jesus instructed them where they should cast their net, and they cast it, and caught a great multitude of fish. When they caught those fish they took them from the element of life into that of death. Jesus said, Henceforth you shall catch men alive, that is, you shall do for men, the exact opposite to what you have been doing in the case of fish. Those fish you have brought from the element of their life to the element of death. You shall bring men from the element of death unto life. You shall catch men, take them alive; you shall lead them into life; you shall bring them to Me, and so bring them unto life; you shall buy them by putting out your own strength and energy in service and sacrifice to bring them into life; you shall draw them in your fellowship with Me from death unto life; you shall infold them in the bundle of life.

That is the real thought of my text. Let us go back to Proverbs and think of it as a whole. First of all, we have a series of parental discourses on wisdom by a father to his son, then a collection of proverbs made by Solomon during his lifetime, then a collection of proverbs made in the time of Hezekiah, finally, certain speeches by men unknown to us. The whole book is unified by its perpetual contrast of two ideals of life, two methods of life, two conditions in which men live: the way of wisdom and the way of folly, the way of righteousness and the way of wickedness, the way of godliness and the way of godlessness, the way of life and the way of death. In my contrasts I have introduced only one word that is not in the book of Proverbs, the word "Godlessness." All the rest are there, and that is plainly inferred. In the discourses on wisdom, and in the Proverbs these things are put into contrast: wisdom and folly, rightness and wickedness, godliness and godlessness, life and death. Right here, in the heart of the book, the preacher says, "He that is wise winneth souls," that is catcheth men, leading them from folly to wisdom, from wickedness to rightness, from godlessness to godliness, from death to life. This is also what Jesus said, "Henceforth you shall catch men alive," winning them from the element of death and bringing them into the element of life, wherein all the meaning of their personalities will be fulfilled to the uttermost. The work is winning, not spirits alone, not minds only, not bodies simply, but men.

I submit to you - broad, hurried, and necessarily brief as this outlook is on a great subject - that it is a great enterprise to win souls, to capture men and bring them from darkness into light, from death to life. It is a worthy enterprise, that is, it is worth while. There is no enterprise that confronts a man when he stands in the bloom of his young man-hood that ought to appeal to him like this. There is no enterprise that presents itself to a girl in the beauty and freshness of her youth that ought to capture her dear heart like this. To win souls, to lead human beings out of darkness into light, out of death into life, out of paralysis and failure and heart-break into power and victory and joy, is a worthy enterprise. I submit to you, it is an enterprise which brings more satisfaction and delight to the soul than any other. I say to you, my Christian brothers and sisters who have never yet given yourselves to this work, you do not yet know the joy of life. There is no joy in the world like the joy of seeing a broken, soiled, spoiled man or woman healed, cleansed, renewed; to observe the haunting fear in the eyes as first we saw them changed into dancing joy when they have come to Christ and to life. To win souls, to catch men, women, and children, to take them alive, out of the element of death into the element of life - that is a worthy enterprise, a satisfying enterprise, a delightful enterprise.

In his proverb the preacher said, "He that is wise winneth souls." What is the wisdom that is necessary for this enterprise, for doing this work? What did he mean by wisdom? All the book of Proverbs reveals what he meant. The other wisdom book, which came from the same pen, the book of Ecclesiastes, will show what he meant. The third wisdom book of the Old Testament, with which in all likelihood this man was familiar, for it is probably the most ancient of all the Old Testament books, the book of Job, will show what he meant. Wisdom, in the sense in which these books are designated wisdom books, meant simply what we mean by philosophy. In these books we find the philosophy of the Hebrew religion. There is a distinction between the philosophy as discovered to us in these wisdom books and all other philosophies which I will only mention now. The Hebrew philosophy began with the affirmation of God. All others begin with Pilate's question, "What is truth?" Do not misunderstand that passing illustration. I am not criticizing the method of the question, but reminding you that the Hebrew philosophers did not begin with that question. They affirmed God, and proceeded on the presupposition that God is all-wise, that wisdom could be perfectly predicated only of God, that apart from Him there is no wisdom, that in Him all wisdom dwells. From that presupposition they deduced their doctrine of human wisdom. I go back to the beginning of this wonderful book of Proverbs and find a definition. The preface is in the first seven verses of the first chapter; then the writer gives his definition of wisdom:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

These Hebrew philosophers believed that wisdom in man was the result of man's right relationship to God. God is the fountain of all wisdom, and in proportion as man submits himself to His law and seeks His knowledge and His guidance and direction, in that proportion man is wise. I am inclined to say, in spite of all the centuries that have passed since these wisdom books were written, that it was a very sound philosophy. I turn to the New Testament and I do not find that conception of wisdom altered. I do find it is illuminated, that a new light is breaking out, because there is a new revelation of God. In the letter to the Romans Paul comes to a point where he breaks out into a great doxology; "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out!" That is the Hebrew conception of God as the All-wise, but it follows the great apostolic teaching concerning salvation. I turn from that to the Corinthian letter and I find the same man writing to people who are being darkened in understanding by false philosophies in the Corinthian city, and he tells them that God has chosen the foolish things of the world to bring to nought the wise things of the world, until at last he reaches the culmination of his teaching when he declares that Christ Jesus "was made unto us wisdom from God." Then he analyzes the wisdom, declaring it to be "both righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

Thus the New Testament doctrine of wisdom is that it exists in God, that man is wise only as he comes into right relationship with God, and that wisdom has manifested itself in a method by which men, blind and foolish and far away and in darkness, may see and return and be enabled. Paul declares that for humanity in its sin and shame the ultimate unveiling of the wisdom of God is in the redemption that He has provided for man in Christ Jesus.

Then I turn to James - the supremely ethical writer of the New Testament, whose very letter is saturated with the Sermon on the Mount, and with Proverbs and the wisdom books of the Old Testament - and I find that he gives us a description of what wisdom is when it is at work: "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy."

In this passage we have a perfect description of the man who wins souls. If, then, I am to be engaged in this great enterprise I must have the wisdom that cometh down from above. There is a wisdom, says James, that does not come down from above, it is earthly, sensual, devilish, and so he dismisses it. He then describes the wisdom that cometh down from above, and so shows us the wise man as God sees him. This is the man who is able to catch men and lead them from darkness to light. Let us then observe what James says about the wisdom that cometh from above, not in its widest applications, but with our minds fastened on this one subject of the capacity for winning souls. In this declaration three little words must be carefully observed which are not descriptive words but which mark a method: "First, pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy." My emphasis has brought out the words I ask you to observe: "First ... then … without." "First," that which is fundamental in this wisdom; "then," the attitudes of mind that result; "without," the things that are excluded. What is fundamental? Purity. What are the things that result? "Peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits." What are the things that are excluded when this wisdom masters the life? "Variance, hypocrisy."

The first word needs no comment; the wise man must be "pure." Then the attitudes of mind. "Peaceable" means not merely that the wise man is in himself a man who loves peace, but that he is pacific, that he makes for peace. Immediately the word of Jesus comes to our minds, the word from the great Manifesto, "Blessed are the peacemakers." The next word, translated "gentle" really means patient. The next word, "easy to be entreated," is a great word and certainly admits of two interpretations. This translation is the interpretation of the revisers, and I do not agree with it. "Easy to be entreated," suggests a man who can be approached easily, but I believe it means more, it means persuasive. "Full of mercy," that is, full of compassion. "Full … of good fruits," that is, full of the very things these needy people are waiting for. All these things lie within wisdom. They may be remembered by simple alliteration: pure, pacific, patient, persuasive, potential. These are the very qualities that are necessary if we are to win men.

First, pure. I cannot win men from impurity to purity if I am impure. I cannot catch men from the element of death and bring them into life if I myself am abiding in the element of death. I cannot lure men to walk the sunlit path if I hug the place where shadows lie and the darkness is thick. "First, pure." The man who attracts other men to holiness is the pure man. The reason why many people are utterly incapacitated for winning souls is that within their life is harbored, permitted, entertained, something that is impure and unholy. First, pure.

Then peaceable, pacific, making peace. Then patient. Ah, me, how often much patience is needed for winning souls! How they disappoint us, how they break out again and again into the same old sins, and how we are tempted to say, We will wash our hands of them! Never! The wisdom that is from above never washes its hands of the most hopeless, failing souls. Love never faileth. Love is at the heart of the wisdom of God. Then persuasive, knowing how to deal with men so as to lead them to the light. Then potential, replete with compassion, which is the desire to give good fruits, which are the very gifts for which men wait.

This wisdom that is from above excludes variance. Here I deliberately go back to the Authorized Version, and prefer its rendering, "partiality." God is no respecter of persons, we are told. That is not so. He is a respecter of persons. The Bible does not say that He is not. The Bible says God is no respecter of faces, and the word was spoken to Jews, who thought that their very faces won them the respect of God! That quality of impartiality is necessary if we are to win souls. We so often have respect for faces; we do have hope of but not of that other man. We look at certain people and come to the conclusion that they are not salvable. Such a conclusion is always a lie, a blasphemy. There is no man on whom Grace cannot work God's perfect will if he can be brought into right relationship therewith.

Again, without hypocrisy, that is, without pretense. In the mystery of the common human mind there is a most remarkable detection of any kind of hypocrisy or cant in a man who is trying to talk about religion. All our influence is killed if our attempt to draw a man to religion is mere pretense.

This is the wisdom that cometh down from above. This is the wisdom that is needed if we are to win men. This winning of souls is not a mechanical business which we can go to school to learn; it is not an easy arrangement which can be taken up by people when they have read a certain number of books dealing with the subject. The capacity for dealing with souls is that wisdom which cometh from above, which is, first, pure, then contains within itself these great and gracious qualities, and excludes partiality and hypocrisy. The capacity to win souls lies in life homed in the will of God, responsive to the grace of God, incarnating the very life of the Christ of God. "He that winneth souls is wise." "He that is wise winneth souls."

It seems to me that I need take no time with the third line of thought, save briefly to refer to it. I need not argue the wisdom of the work. Why is it wise to win souls? Because this satisfies God. God is against the spoiling of human lives and the wanderings of men into the paths that run out into pathlessness. Catch them, catch them alive, bring them back, turn them again into the way of peace, and God is gladdened. It is wise to win souls, for it satisfies God.

It is wise to win souls, for it glorifies man, and that in the true sense. Oh, the wasted wealth of humanity, the powers and capacities and potentialities blighted, spoiled, ruined! Oh, the agony of it! Win them, catch them, renew them! This is great, gracious, and glorious work. To see that which was out of the way turn into the way, that on which rested the cankerworm and the mildew and blight, breaking out into blossom and beauty and flowers and fruit. To see that man whose very face had become the awful sign manual of his lust being transformed into a man whose face is a revelation of the love of God. To see that girl whose eyes, naturally full of life and love, had become hard and scornful and devilish transformed, until from them flashes the glorious light of the eyes of Christ. It is great work, this!

It is wise to win souls. It is wise to win souls, moreover, because by winning souls we hasten the coming of the day of God.

Are we winning souls? Are we catching men? If not, why not? Is it that we have never seen the glory of the enterprise? Or is it that we lack the wisdom necessary? If it be that we have never been winners of souls because we have never seen the glory of the enterprise, then let us get near to Christ, really near to Him, spiritually near to Him. Resolutely forgetting and putting right out of our lives for one short hour all the influences of friends and others, and getting near to Him, and looking from His viewpoint, what shall we see? We shall see the extreme glory of humanity as we have never seen it. We shall see as He sees, that when God in the counsel of His great wisdom said, "Let us make man," He said a great thing. We shall see the consequent tragedy of human undoing as we have never seen it. The man who sees only the ruin of humanity has never seen the ruin of humanity. That man who is impressed only by the foolishness he finds in human nature does not know the tragedy of human undoing. But if behind the face bruised, marred, scarred, and battered, bloated, blasted, we can see the potential image of God, then we shall begin to know the tragedy of sin. Jesus looked through the mask (more than a mask), through the disfigurements of sin to the potential that lay behind. Thus He saw the tragedy of the leprosy. If we can see with Him, then the master passion of life will be to win souls, to have some share in the glorious enterprise of realizing the latent possibilities of humanity, in order to glorify that humanity and in order to glorify the God Who thought it and made it.

If we know the glory of the enterprise and fain would be winners of souls, but are conscious of our lack of the wisdom necessary, then let us return to an earlier word of James in this same letter: "If any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God, Who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not."

I lack the wisdom, God knows how I lack it, and how I feel I lack it, the wisdom that is first pure, then peaceable, pacific, patient, persuasive, potential, and without partiality or pretense. I lack it, but I am going to ask for it, and when I do so, ashamed that I am so lacking, He does not upbraid me, and He will give it. I, even I, can have it! I can have this wisdom. I also may become a winner of souls.

Shall we not presently get away somewhere quietly and put ourselves at His disposal, that in the power of the wisdom that cometh from above we may share the high and holy enterprise?