**VOLUME 9; CHAPTER 01 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**PLAYING THE FOOL by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*... behold, I have played the fool.*

*1 Samuel 26:21*

THAT IS AUTOBIOGRAPHY; CLEAR, TRUTHFUL, INCLUSIVE. In half-a-dozen words we have the story of Saul, Israel's first king, like the nations. Under stress of circumstances, men often tell truths and whole truths, which, if they had time to think, they would never utter. God's method of crisis is that of the commonplace. His method of examination is that of the unannounced. When for a moment a man is off-guard, in all probability you will know more truth about him than in all his attempts either to reveal himself or to hide himself. The ever-present consciousness, habitually, carefully hidden, flashes forth. Later, he may apologize and say he did not mean what he said, that he was not at the moment responsible. The fact is that he was surprised into saying what he was constantly thinking. In all probability Saul had never said that before and would never say it again; but he had been thinking it for a long time, "I have played the fool." It is an error to suppose that a man does not know the truth about himself. In that sense also, God hath not left Himself without witness. There is no escape for any man as long as reason continues, from the bare, naked, unadorned truth about himself. He may practice the art of deceit so skillfully as not only to hide himself from his fellow men, but in his unutterable folly to imagine that he has hidden himself from God; but he has never hidden himself from himself. In some moment of stress and strain, he says what he has been thinking all the time. So with Saul.

Saul had slept deeply that night, for the record tells us that "a deep sleep from the Lord was fallen" upon him. He was awakened from his slumber by the voice of David calling to him from the opposite mountain. Waking he became keen, acute, neither dulled by food nor drugged by wine; everything was clear and sharp about him, as it so often is in the waking moment. Ere he knew it, he had said, "… behold, I have played the fool. …" That is the whole story of the man.

Let us consider then the man who spoke; the opportunities that came to him; how he played the fool; in order that we may finally inquire what this story has in it for us.

Let us look at the man as he is revealed to us in the passage we read, and as he is revealed in all those chapters from beginning to the sad and dire calamity in the midst of which they end.

In the first place, he was a man of good family. His father Kish, a Benjamite, was a "mighty man of valor," that is of substance, wealth. Saul looked upon life from the viewpoint of good family connections, that viewpoint from which every young man would desire to look upon life; a viewpoint which should compel a man to thank God every day he lives.

I observe, in the second place, that Saul was a man of splendid physique, "… a young man and goodly: …" says the record, standing head and shoulders above his fellows, a man with all the advantages of height, and health, and handsomeness. Let no man undervalue these things. I know perfectly well what may be in the minds of some of you, especially those who lack those qualities. You will remember that Isaac Watts wrote:

Were I so tall to reach the Pole

Or grasp the ocean with my span;

I must be measured by my soul

The mind's the standard of the man.

Quite right; but let no haggard and thin man pretend he does not admire the magnificent physique of his friend!

In the record, I also find that this man was a man of simple life, a yet greater advantage; living at home, interested in his father's affairs, and bound to his father by the ties of very sincere and honest affection. When we are introduced to him, he is about his father's business. In those long wanderings in fruitless search after the lost asses of his father, there is a revealing touch in the fact that at last he said to his servant, "… Come, and let us return; lest my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought of us." Saul had all the advantages of actual work and responsibility in rural surroundings. No sane man would live in a city if he could escape it. As Bismarck said, "Great cities are great sores upon the body politic."

Further, he was a man of modest disposition; a man who, when he was saluted by the seer in those remarkable words which suggested to him that all desirable things in the kingdom were for him, replied that he was a Benjamite, the smallest of the tribes, and a member of the family that was least in the tribe. In that answer was revealed the pride of modesty.

Once more, he was a man of slumbering courage. Its manifestation came after a little while, in his action when the nation was insulted by Nahash. The story I am not going to tell for you know it. Simply let me say of the man Saul that he was a man of that courage which farms until occasion demands and then strikes with passion and force in defence of national life.

That is the man who at the end said, "… behold, I have played the fool. ..."

Let us look again at the opportunity which came to him. It was a unique, remarkable, surprising opportunity. He was called to kingship, to a position of responsibility and authority in the life of the nation. The people had clamored for a king; it was an evil clamor, it was a clamor that proved their degeneracy; it was a clamor according to God's interpretation of it to His servant Samuel, which demonstrated the fact that they had rejected Him from being King. Nevertheless, they had clamored for a king and in working out His own purpose, following that principle which always characterizes the Divine activity, that of giving people what they ask for and thus compelling them to work out their own desires to ultimate manifestation, He granted them a king; but He chose the king, He selected him. The call to Saul was clear, definite, solemn. What a scope for his powers! What a chance to bless men from that high position of authority. What an opportunity to co-operate with God in such a way as to prove to the people that God was still King. What an opportunity to exercise authority under the authority of God in such a way that through his authority the authority of God might be manifested anew, and the heart of the people turned back to Him from Whom they had wandered. It was a great hour and a great call.

Notice further, not only his opportunity in itself, but in its equipment. His first equipment was himself. He was such a man as he was, and in that fact lay great value for the doing of the work to which God had called him. Whenever God calls a man to high vocation, it is not merely true to say He will confer upon him what he needs for the fulfilment of that vocation; it is also true that He has chosen the right man for the work. If God calls a man to preach, it is not merely true that He will give him his message and equip him for his preaching, it is also true that He has called a man who can preach. The call of God is always answered by the capacity that lies within a man; it is made to that. Saul had himself; he was kingly in himself. He was equipped in his own personality, having within it the capacity for kingship which God recognized in the moment in which He called him to the place of kingship.

He had more than that; he had God with him. Said Samuel to him, "… God is with thee," and as he turned, from Samuel and went on his way, he was conscious of some strange change, "… God gave him another heart: …" and he became another man. More than that. "… the Spirit of God came mightily upon him, …" and on his journey home he joined a company of the sons of the prophets who were traveling; and lo, the Divine afflatus possessed him, and he saw visions and lifted up his voice and uttered words of Divine truth.

There were other forces at his disposal. He was equipped in the matter of, the men who were about him. His preparation for his work is demonstrated by the friends he possessed, and by the foes he discovered. Samuel was with him, and there is no more radiant verse in the story than this, pregnant with suggestiveness, "… there went with him the host, whose hearts God had touched." He was prepared for kingship by the fact of his foes. Who were they? The sons of Belial, worthless, base fellows. You may often know what a man is by discovering who his foes are. When the sons of Belial are against a man, you may believe in him.

This is the man who at the end said, "… behold, I have, played the fool. …"

Let us now ask how he played the fool. Going over the old, well-known story in the most rapid way, I want to speak of the manifestations of his folly, and that in order that we may try to find the secrets thereof.

The first manifestation came very early; soon after his anointing. When they sought him on that subsequent day of popular election which was to ratify the Divine election, he was hiding away; and in that hiding away there is the first manifestation of weakness, the first evidence of folly. I am going to say to you quite frankly that I know a great many will join issue with me here. I have heard it declared by men for whom I have the profoundest respect, that the hiding away was a new demonstration of his modesty, but I ask you to remember that there is a modesty which is wholly evil. If God has called a man to kingship, he has no right to hide away. If God has called a man definitely, anointed him, equipped him to take charge of the Empire, if that man out of any sense of modesty shall hide away and try to escape the responsibility, therein is the first evidence of his weakness. So it was with Saul.

I notice next that this man manifested a strange new form of military pride. For the first time there was established in this nation a standing army, and I begin to see the line along which his kingship is going to move. Saul created a standing army of three thousand men, he himself taking charge of two thousand while the remaining thousand were with Jonathan. Note the sequence; the whole story is graphically told. Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines and Saul blew the trumpet in Israel. Israel heard that Saul had smitten the garrison!

I watch him a little further and observe that he has become restless, impatient, self-dependent. Samuel has not come; then we can do without Samuel; offer the sacrifices! He violated a principle, and despised a command in the rush of his restless impatience.

I follow him a little further and find another story, the story of his rashness in taking an oath which imperiled the life of Jonathan which would have resulted in his death if the people had not interfered and rescued him.

I go a little further and find another illustration of his failure; his disobedience in the matter of Amalek and his lying afterwards.

The most glaring revelation of his folly is that ruthless, persistent, undying hatred of David; hunting him, as David himself did say, like a partridge upon the mountains.

The last manifestation of his folly is that in which we see him in the night time commerce with the underworld of evil, and trying to find out the hidden secrets through the muttering of a witch. A man with whom God was, who received from God a new heart and became another man, who was mightily clothed with the Spirit of God so that he joined the ranks of the prophets. What a morning of promise! At last, in the darkness of the night he is seen creeping stealthily to find a muttering witch, dealing with evil spirits. He was startled and surprised in the darkness of the night, for there also he found God, and to her surprise, the witch found God for Samuel came. That is the last phase of his folly.

These are but the manifestations, the symptoms, the results. The tragedy of the man's life lies deeper. His hiding away, his military pride, his impatience, his self-dependence, his rashness, his disobedience and lying, his hatred of David, his traffic with the witch; these are all manifestations of something deeper. Wherein then lay the folly of this man? I shall answer my question fundamentally and processionally. I shall speak of that which is fundamental and then ask you to notice how that expressed itself in the man's history.

I am almost afraid to tell you the fundamental wrong because it has so often been said and because the saying of it is not the sort of thing that troubles men as it ought to do. It is so old a story. The fundamental wrong of this man was that he failed to submit himself to the one King. Lack of loyalty to God; that was it. That is nothing new, of course. That is what we hear so constantly; so constantly that all the keen edge goes off the truth, and men are not troubled by it as they should be. In that terrific hour when the prophet told him of his rejection, we have these words, which are quoted often enough, "… to obey is better than sacrifice, and to, hearken than the fat of rams." Therein lay the man's failure, that he had not obeyed, that he had not hearkened; "… I have.played the fool. …" Created by God, being in myself all that I am by God's creative act, called by God to high, dignified destiny, equipped by God with all that was necessary for the fulfilment of that destiny; "… I have played the fool …" in that I have forgotten God to Whom I owe myself, my destiny, my equipment. He had trusted in his own strength, he had trusted in natural advantages; but he had forgotten that his own strength was God's gift to him, that his own natural advantages came to him from God. He had forgotten God.

Mark the manifestation of it. No longer in the events chronicled but in the processes which are revealed. This man failed entirely to exercise the true function of kingship. This man in his government of Israel was a warrior and nothing more; he was never a shepherd. He manifested from the first only one kind of concern about his people, concern about the frontier, concern about enemies. It had its place; it was necessary that he should make war upon the Philistines, and this he did successfully through a long period. I not affirming that he was wrong in being a warrior; the times demanded it, and the command of God was that he should deliver his people from Philistia. But that concluded his kingly activity. He had no care for the people; he lacked the shepherd heart. It was Homer who said, "All kings are shepherds." These words of Homer are certainly vindicated by the biblical revelation of what kingship means. Kingship is always shepherdhood in the Divine economy. There is no greater psalm in all the five books, celebrating the Kingship of God, than that old and familiar one which we so constantly recite, "The Lord is my Shepherd." That is the supreme song of Jehovah's Kingship. This man Saul lacked the shepherd heart and the shepherd quality.

Then observe, as he passed on through the years, his neglect of his true friends; his neglect of Samuel, his cruelty and injustice to Jonathan, and the persistent, devilish hunting of David to which we have already made reference. He became a man, self-conscious, self-dependent, self-assertive, self-centered.

These evidences of the man's folly are simply revelations of the things resulting from that central, fundamental wrong; for if he had not forgotten God but had been obedient to Him, then in communion with Him he would have been not a warrior alone, but a shepherd also. If he had not forgotten God and ceased to be loyal to Him, he would have known the value of Samuel and Jonathan and David. The man who forgets God is self-centered. Every man lives under the government of God or of Himself. The man who forgetting God, neglecting Him, disobeying Him, living without Him, finds his soul circumferences around the center of his own desire, lust, passion, will and waywardness. That man inevitably in some hour of crisis will be compelled to the confession, "…behold, I have played the fool. …"

So finally, let us gather from the story some of the things it ought to say to us immediately. I suggest to you, first of all, that the story of Saul teaches us that advantages are not insurances of success. You may have all the advantages and yet at last be a disastrous failure. Advantages as to family, and physique, of natural disposition characterized at once by modesty and courage are all valuable; but a man may have all these and yet play the fool. I say that almost with bated breath lest I be misunderstood. Do not undervalue your family relationships. When next you think of your advantages, head the list, if indeed it be true, with this: my father lived a clean life before me and left me the legacy of his example; and my mother prayed for me through all the days. But remember, your father's example and your mother's prayers are not enough. A man may have had these things also, the highest spiritual family advantages, and yet he may play the fool.

I observe, in the second place, that the story of Saul teaches that opportunities do not crown men. You may have heard the call of God, a kingdom may be waiting for you to govern it, rule it, administer it. You may have with you the comradeship of the good. These things are all valuable, indeed they are all necessary if life is to be fulfilled. But a man may have the whole of them and play the fool. A man may have heard in his soul the call of God to the ministry, to the mission field, to professional life at home, to commercial life at home, for I maintain that in these things God also calls distinctly as to other things. You may know you are where God put you. Saul knew it, the anointing oil had been upon his head, he had made no mistake. The profound, spiritual conviction is yours that you are exactly where God would have you be. Yet you may play the fool, spoil your life, miss your kingdom, weaken your volition, end disastrously. So thinly separated from opportunities crowning a man, every opportunity for that which is high, noble, wonderful, is an opportunity for terrific failure. The greater the opportunity that comes to you, the greater the possibility of disaster, unless you find the secret of life and obey it.

I learn, quite simply and finally, from this study that there is one thing necessary. The one thing necessary for the fulfilment of life is that of surrender, loyalty, obedience to God. Apart from that there can be no proper understanding of life. Apart from that there is no wisdom or power to deal with life.

I know full well as I speak to you how the minds and hearts of some of you will rebel against such a statement as that; that a man may tell me he knows himself and his capacities and powers and knows perfectly well the true way to deal with these to assure success to himself. Well, I pray you think again, and think more deeply, and recognize the fact ere it be too late, ere disaster come, that no man knows himself perfectly, finally. If you would have witnesses to the thing I am now saying, they are here; I cannot call them, cannot ask them to speak, but they are here; men who are going grey, men who have been weathering the storms and finding out themselves. They will tell you that the most astonishing hours that have ever come to them were hours in which they discovered in themselves things they never dreamed were there; things sometimes of good and sometimes of evil. The last words of the old Greek philosophy were great words, "Man, know thyself." It was great because it brought every man face to face with himself and so to the discovery that he was greater than he had ever known, so great that he could not know himself. Infinitely more true to the experience of human life was the word of the Psalmist in the Hebrew psalter, in that marvelous one hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm, opening as it does,

O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me,

Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising,

Thou understandest my thought afar off.

Then the Psalmist said,

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

It is high, I cannot attain unto it.

"Such knowledge, …" that is knowledge of myself. I do not know myself. When a man has learned that lesson, then he is prepared to submit himself to the One Who knows him, and so the great psalm which opens with the affirmation,

O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me

ends with the prayer,

Search me, O God, and know my heart:

Try me, and know my thoughts:

And see if there be any way of wickedness in me,

And lead me in the way everlasting.

That is the language of the wisdom of the man who realizing God's knowledge and his own ignorance, will submit himself to God at the beginning of life, when the flush of dawn is upon the sky and high hope is singing its song in his heart. The man who will begin there will never end by saying, "… I have played the fool, …" for "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Apart from his surrender, loyalty, obedience to God, there can be no proper understanding of life, no adequate wisdom or power to deal with life.

There are many manifestations of the fundamental folly. I will content myself with grouping those suggested by the story. A man plays the fool if he halts when God calls him to some pathway of service. Has he called you, my brother, did you hear the call? Why are you hiding? End your folly, and march according to the Divine command.

A man plays the fool when he neglects his best friends. What are these new friends that make you neglect the old ones? How is it that we have missed you recently from the fellowship of the saints of God? God set round about some of you a band of men whose hearts He Himself has touched. Why neglect their company? I believe in the communion of saints. I believe in the value of keeping in the comradeship of the saints. I do protest that unless I maintain my comradeship with the saints, I shall wander from the path of the just. I owe more to the spiritual sympathy and help of the children of God than I can ever tell. How many a man have I seen drift out of the Christian church and out of Christian work because he has neglected the friends that God provided.

A man plays the fool if he marches upon the Divine enterprise when God has not commanded him. That is only the reverse of the other truth that a man plays the fool when he halts when God commands. Go upon no enterprise at your own charge. Await the Divine command, for therein is the Divine covenant, and the Divine covenant provides that thou shalt find the resources needed to meet the command. A march without God is a march of unutterable folly toward final disaster.

A man plays the fool if he disobeys in even the smallest matter. To obey is better than sacrifice. The religious excuse is the most damnable of all excuses. To disobey God in the interest of religion is to blaspheme.

A man plays the fool when he attempts to justify the wrong he has done. It is upon the basis of confession that God can forgive sin and reinstate a man in righteousness. That is not merely a Divine enactment and requirement. It is a moral necessity. When a man justifies wrong, tries to excuse it, he is playing the fool; for he is keeping the evil thing that has already threatened to ruin him.

A man plays the fool unutterably when he allows some hatred to master him, as Saul did in the case of David.

There is some man here who is saying, "… behold, I have played the fool…." What shall I say to that man? What that man supremely needs is help that comes down to his level, takes hold of him, touches him in pity but also in power, bends over him in infinite compassion, but also with force that will remake him.

That is what Browning felt when he wrote his great poem:

'Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for! my flesh that I seek

In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul it shall be

A Face like my face that receives thee: a Man like to me,

Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever! a Hand like this hand

Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!

To every man tonight who is saying in the deepest of his soul almost in despair, "… behold, I have played the fool, ..." I say, "… See the Christ stand!" He has come to the foolish to make them wise, to the ruined to redeem them, to the lost to find them, to the impure to purify them, to the dis-crowned kings to crown them, to the souls that have unutterably and disastrously failed to realize within them the original intention and lift them into the place of fellowship with God.