**VOLUME 9; CHAPTER 05 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE UNCHANGING ONE by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Jesus Christ ... the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever.*

*Hebrews 13:8*

THERE IS NOTHING MORE CERTAIN OR MORE IMPRESSIVE THAN the transitory nature of all earthly things. We change our calendars, and become conscious as we do so, that we ourselves have changed. Then we glance around us, and we find that there has been change everywhere. And even while we are in the act of thinking, we have changed again, and all around us is changing even as we look.

Now, this fact of change is at once the salt and the poison of life. It is the salt of life preventing monotony, that deadly foe of the soul. It is the poison of life paralyzing effort, that vital ally of the soul. Change is of the very nature of life and is necessary to life. Change takes on the guise of death and checks the movements of life. Thus are we perplexed, and earnestly do we desire to find some center of permanence and some secret of perennial freshness.

We need a center of permanence, not an anchorage. An anchorage means limitation and monotony. An anchorage belongs to a ship and is a hindrance to the ship. The tug of the ship to be away from the shore and out upon the sea is of its very nature and being, and the anchor holds it back. We are not asking for anchorage. The only sense in which the figure of the anchor is warranted is when it is used, as it was used by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, in such form that it is contradicted in the very suggestions it makes.

In an earlier part of this letter he said: "… the hope set before us; which we have as an anchor of the soul, … both sure and stedfast." Yes! but let us finish the quotation! "… entering within the veil." In that phrase he has contradicted his own symbol finely, intelligently; not blunderingly. It is the figure of the anchor cast, not where the shoals are, but within the veil; the place of finality, the place of satisfaction, and eternity, and God. Thus the figure breaks down, but in the magnificence of its breakdown, it is fitting in every sense and at any and every time. The anchorage which we need must have some element, sure, unshakable, persistent, continuous; and because we are persons, let us at once say, some Person, never destroyed, never weary, never changing.

And we ask not merely a sign of permanence, but a secret of freshness; not excitement, that means reaction and yet more deadly inertia; but some element growing, developing, surprising the soul. And once again, because we are persons, we need some Person always alive, full of initiation, and ever equal to realization. Where shall we turn for these things?

We look within, and if there be one place where we fail to find the stability for which we cry out and the springing freshness we desire, it is within. We look to our friends, and the story is tragic. The air is full of farewells to the dying. We look to circumstances, and there is neither anchorage that holds nor freshness that satisfies the soul. Where are we? Great God! Where are we? We must find anchorage in that broader sense of the word somewhere. Where shall we turn?

Such thinking inevitably recalls those lines of the last hymn which Henry Francis Lyte ever wrote, the hymn he wrote two months before he crossed the bar and saw his Pilot face to face; a hymn which in his intention did not refer to the closing of the natural day but to the close of life:

Abide with me! fast falls the eventide;

The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide!

When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,

Help of the helpless, O abide with me!

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day!

Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away,

Change and decay in all around I see,

O Thou, who changest not, abide with me!

When Henry Francis Lyte wrote those lines as expressive of his own experience, he wrote a hymn for humanity; one of the few, rare hymns throbbing with the elemental things of the human soul and capturing the heart and conscience of men everywhere; we do not wonder that the hymn is sung today around the world.

What warrant had he to write that hymn? The warrant is found in my text. The man who wrote that hymn was a man who believed that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

In the declaration of this text is found the perfect answer to the two-fold cry of the human soul. Let us remind ourselves then of the eternal freshness of Christ. He is always alive; "… I am alive for evermore …"; always beginning some new thing, "I am the Beginning …"; always realizing and consummating that which He does begin, "… I am the Ending …". Let us remind ourselves of the unchanging nature of Christ. He is never destroyed nor can He be; never weary, however weary we may be; never changing, for love never faileth, and love altereth not when it alteration finds. He is unchanged in the fact of His perpetual freshness, so that no soul has ever found it to be monotonous to walk with Him or talk with Him or think of Him or sing of Him; He is perpetually breaking in upon the soul with new surprises, in some amazing and lightning flash, or as the freshness of a morning in the springtime. He is the same yesterday and today and forever.

The text is in itself the message with which I would greet and hearten my own soul and that of each of those who may be reached by my words. I do not propose to defend this statement of the writer. I affirm it anew and pray that its music may strengthen our faith, may brighten our hope, may deepen our love. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Let us then attempt to listen to the music as we consider Jesus Christ yesterday, Jesus Christ today, Jesus Christ forever.

Sometimes, in order to gain a better understanding, we must tarry long enough to be mechanical and so to catch the true meaning of the thing I which is written. Therefore we pause to notice the peculiar title employed at this point by the writer of the letter. Jesus Christ! These were the usual names which this writer used in reference to our Lord but generally in separation from each other. In this letter, He is constantly referred to by the human name, the simple name of Jesus. In this letter also, over and over again He is referred to by the august and dignified title of Christ. Jesus was a Hebrew name. There were hundreds of boys who bore that name in Galilee and Judaea for it is but the Greek form of the old Hebrew name Joshua. The name had peculiar associations, setting it apart and differentiating it from all other names in that it was a name that was coined for the man who first bore it by his great predecessor, Moses. Yet it had become common, and so attention is fastened in the first case upon the fact that our Lord is essentially of our own nature and of our own being, of our own emotions and of our own temptations. Jesus is one of us. Our thought is first brought face to face with that fact. But we must remember that this name is not introduced in this letter until we reach what we speak of as our second chapter and ninth verse. The one referred to there as Jesus was introduced at the beginning of the letter in other terms and by other designations. At the commencement of this letter, He is described as Son of God, heir of all things, through Whom God did fashion the ages; the effulgence of His glory, the very image of His substance, the One Who upheld all things by the word of His power. So was He introduced, and then, presently, this Person is named Jesus! Another statement that will help us to apprehend the mystery is that of John, in what we call the prologue to his Gospel, in which he says: "In the beginning was the logos (Word); and the logos (Word) was with God; and God was the logos (Word); and the logos (Word) became flesh!" That is Jesus!

The other name, Christ, is the Messianic title indicating the fact of the office, the work, the mission of this mysterious Person Who was human and yet was infinitely more than human. He, the King-Priest, is introduced by this title at the third chapter and the fourteenth verse, having been introduced at the beginning of the letter in the way which we have already considered.

Now in this text the two titles are brought together, and the combination is rare in the letter. Only on two other occasions did this writer thus link them. When he spoke of the Lord as the One through Whom the will of God for our sanctification is accomplished, he called Him Jesus Christ. When a little later he spoke of Him as the One through Whom God makes us perfect to do His will, he called Him Jesus Christ. And here, when he was referring to Him as the unchanging One, he named Him by the human name and by the Messianic title. The Person to Whom he referred is the One Whom he had already introduced as Son of God, the effulgence of His glory, the express image of His Person, the One through Whom all things were made, the One Who fashions the ages. It is to this Person that we are introduced, and He is declared by the writer of the letter to be the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

If we are to understand Him, we must consider the yesterday in its limited sense and remind ourselves again of what are described in the New Testament as the days of His flesh. That is the focal point of revelation. The mystic and the infinite Son of God is revealed by this veiling of deity in human flesh.

I am impressed first of all by His appeal to humanity in itself, by what He was in Himself. I am not thinking now of His appeal to humanity in His teaching. Shall I not be accurate when I declare that the teaching of Jesus Christ did not appeal to humanity and that it does not appeal to humanity yet? Humanity must be regenerated before the teaching of Christ makes any vast or powerful appeal to it. I know full well that there are certain parts and portions of the teaching of Christ, expressive of His outlook upon the ultimate purposes of God for this world, which make their appeal to humanity; but when He deals with those things of the soul in which He demands a purity which is awe-inspiring, when He begins to appeal to the human heart and to show it its own disobedience, humanity is still in rebellion against His teaching. There are a thousand men who praise the Sermon on the Mount for its broad outlines who dare not face its personal investigations. Not by the teaching of Christ were men attracted but by what He was in Himself. Today, two millenniums after His earthly manifestation, there is no literature in the world that appeals to men as do these gospel narratives. He came into the midst of human life making hypocrisy impossible while He stood confronting men. Men unveiled themselves, or unmasked themselves, in His presence. They could do nothing other than show themselves. They were often angry as they unmasked themselves, but they were compelled to the act. They were more often comforted as they unveiled themselves. But the supreme fact, the first fact that impresses us is that here was a Man Who moved among men and whenever they came into His presence, they were seen for the men they really were; veils were rent, masks were torn off, duplicity was at an end, hypocrisy perished; they stood naked in the essential facts of their character wherever He came! In His human nature, the very deeps of humanity called to the deeps in humanity, and the deeps in humanity answered the deeps of humanity. Moreover, His appeal was not that of a clan, not that of a tribe, not that of a nation, but that of the race.

I look back at Him once more, and I observe His appeal to humanity in its need. I will cover the whole ground of humanity's need by the use of two of the most commonplace words in our language - sin and sorrow. Observe how He appealed to each. He never excused sin. He never admitted that sin was necessary. There is not a single sentence in the teaching of Christ that suggests that sin is a necessary part of a process by which God is moving to something higher. He never excused it, never admitted that it was necessary. But something else is true. He never abandoned it. He never admitted that it was incurable. In the vocabulary of Jesus there never could have been such an absurd contradiction of terms as we sometimes make use of when we speak of "necessary evils". If necessary, not evil; if evil, never necessary. In the vocabulary of Jesus, such an absurd contradiction of terms as "hopeless cases," never could have been brought together with regard to humanity. No case was hopeless to His eyes. Of those men and women that came into contact with Him in His life, none were hopeless. When He confronted them, they were saved over and over again by faith, not theirs in Him but His in them and by His wonderful confidence in them.

As to sorrow, He never ignored it. It was a great reality to Him. Dear old Faber, that saint infinitely greater than his ecclesiastical convictions either before or after his going to Rome, sang the very truth as he sang that the sorrows of earth are most keenly felt in heaven. While Jesus walked the ways of men, all the sorrows of Palestine that His eyes looked upon settled on His soul and wounded His heart. But He never submitted to sorrow. He never admitted that sorrow was the final thing. In the world you shall have tribulation, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy!

He saw the dark clouds and the sweeping rain! But He forevermore said, "I do set My bow in the cloud! …" He knew the sun, and that the light of it flashed upon the rain drops, symbols of tears and agony, made them radiant with the colors of heaven in hope and joy. Sorrow for Him was never final. It was real, graphic, terrific, evil. He knew it. He was "… a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: …" But he never bowed His head beneath sorrow and yielded to it, never came to despair. He moved breast forward against sorrow for Himself and humanity. He mastered it; He transmuted it!

I look once more at those days of His flesh, and I notice the perpetual surprises of those who were about Him. He was constantly surprising them. I think I may dismiss the whole story, for the purpose of our present meditation, by saying that He trained His disciples by surprise after surprise, surprise after surprise. They thought they knew Him, and they were glad they did and went with Him. Then He startled them by something He did or said. They were halted and then discovered its value and went on a little further. Now they understood Him! Then He wrought some new wonder and they cried: "Who, then, is this?" He was so human that they called Him Jesus of Nazareth. Yet out of that human personality there were always breaking lights and glories and powers and revelations and surprises. How are we to account for this? We account for it because of the longer yesterday. The "yesterday" includes all the infinite mysteries of the far-flung splendors of the ages about which we can only dream and about which we know nothing. In the beginning was the Word, and when tabernacled in human form, walking human pathways, mixing among human beings, lights gleamed, and glories flashed, surprising the heart of the men who were about Him. Jesus Christ yesterday!

And now what of Jesus Christ today? There is a difference, and we must face it. The difference is that He is now gone out of sight, as He said He would in those Paschal discourses from which our lesson was taken, and for a while we shall not see Him. He is gone out of sight. But He also said, "… a little while and ye shall see Me." In that promise there was no reference to a second Advent. He was referring to something that was to be immediate; something to which they actually did come and that soon. Those men who heard Him talk in the Upper Room, Peter, James, and John; Philip, Thomas, and Jude; the men who spoke in the Upper Room, those men lost Him. He passed out of their sight. Then came Pentecost, and they saw Him as they had never seen Him, though they could no longer see Him. He said to them: "… It is expedient for you that I go away …" I do no violence to the thought conveyed if I change the word. "It is better for you that I go away." Why better? Because this Eternal One, localized in flesh, was limited by that localization; because in the midst of His Ministry He was compelled to say, "… I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" Passing out of sight, the sight of sense, in His coming again by the Holy Spirit to the consciousness of such as put their trust in Him, He came into nearer association, came to be the Companion of the spirit-life of men, that inner spirit-life which no man can see, either of himself or of his neighbor, by the eyes of sense. "No man hath seen God at any time …" We all agree that no man hath seen Him at any time. No man hath seen man at any time! Do you agree? It is true. You have never seen me, I have never seen you. We look upon these outward forms, these are but tabernacles. Thank God if we have learned the lesson, that the body, marred, spoiled, broken, laid to rest, was but the tenement house. Jesus said to these men in effect "I am shut outside you by living in this body, while you live in these bodies. I will go away and come again, and come right into the true spirit-life of you and reveal Myself to you by the Spirit, as you never can know Me while I remain outside you." We can have closer fellowship with Jesus than with each other. I am shut out from the final fellowship of my nearest and dearest friend in this world. I must wait for the larger spirit-life that lies beyond. I can have no final spiritual fellowship with my earthly friends, but with Him I can have full spiritual fellowship.

Thus He came again to these men and to us. He is known today through the writings, through spiritual interpretation, and through the saints who in their fellowship with Him are transformed into His likeness and reveal Him to other men. Thus, He is the same. The only thing that is different is the accidental. The essential abides. Through that which I have just described, not carelessly but carefully, as the accidental of the days of His flesh, the essential and abiding was revealed.

I look again to the yesterday, to the days of His flesh, and I declare that He is the same, making the same appeals to humanity. That is the deep secret of the victory of Christianity. All our hindrances are due to the fact that we quarrel about forms and methods of expression and neglect the central authority of the Christ Himself. Oh! shame on us! shame on us! He is the same. Let us remember that whenever we are tempted to quarrel!

He makes the same appeal to humanity. Take that little Testament of yours! Nay, take much less. Take Mark alone, the first and simplest narrative. Print it, give it away. Read it to men everywhere. Read it to them when they are quiet, when they are thoughtful. Let them look, let them listen. So let them see this Jesus. They will come to Him. He will attract them whether they are black or white, whether learned or illiterate, whether high or low, bond or free, rich or poor. When they see Him, they forget black or white, high or low, rich or poor, bond or free, for they have found in Him their own humanity. Humanity ever goes out to the humanity in Him. That is the story of the success of missions.

He makes the same appeal to human nature. He will not excuse sin. He will not excuse my sin. He will never allow me to say in His presence that I was bound to sin. We cannot say it, we dare not say it in His presence. We say it to each other. We say it to our own souls sometimes. "We could not help it." We know we lie when we say it! But when we are alone with Him we dare not look into His face and say we were bound to sin! We know it is not true. All modern philosophy in so far as it says that sin is necessary is a lie against which this Christ of God proceeds, and he will deny it in the human conscience ere His mission is completed. Man need not sin.

But it is also true that we cannot say in His presence that our sin is incurable. It is not incurable. He believes in us. He has perfect confidence in humanity. He is producing the same effects today as of old, effects which I shall not enumerate, but summarize in His own sweet word, "Rest." "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." In that word I find, righteousness, peace, joy, the things of the Kingdom of God.

He is the same today in His mysteriousness, still surprising the soul, still breaking out upon us at some point in life, amazing us and then explaining His own surprise and moving us a little further on toward the final knowledge.

So let me end, with only a brief sentence or two. He is the same forever. The phrase that the writer actually used was most suggestive. "Forever," is altogether too mechanical. It is trying to say everything. We cannot say everything. Let us dare to be poetic in company with the Bible. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and to the ages! They come, they pass, they go! The year has broken, the year has dawned. It is for us a new age, but a hand breadth, but a span; but it serves to illustrate everything that is suggested by the phrase, to the ages.

We are always at the beginning of a new age. Behind us are ages; before us are ages! Now the writer says that this One Who came into human history and human life, and Whom He names Son of God, Jesus, Christ, is the same to the ages! At the beginning of this letter he declared that this One fashions the ages, determines their nature, limits their duration, includes their forces.

Heaven will never be monotonous. There will always be new satisfaction for the heart. We shall never become satiated with the things spiritual. The unfathomed deeps and distances of the ages lie before us, but He will lead us through them. Therefore am I no longer afraid of the vastness of the outlook.

That Living One is in our midst now, calling us to rest. He is the center of all that is permanent, the spring of all that is fresh. Dare I be afraid? Amid the shock of battle, the stress of life, and the overwhelming perplexities of things, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

March on my soul, without fear or faltering, for the Pierced Hand holds the scepter of the universe! All is well!