**VOLUME 9; CHAPTER 10 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE RESURRECTION by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*... it was not possible that He should be holden of it.*

*Acts 2:24*

SO FAR AS THE RECORDS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT REVEAL, THESE words constitute the first Pentecostal comment upon the fact of the Resurrection. They occur in the second part of the discourse delivered upon the Day of Pentecost by Peter. In the early part of that discourse, he set the things upon which men were looking and which were filling their hearts with astonishment, in relation to the prophetic writings of the Hebrew people. Having done this he commenced, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words …"; and then in brief and wonderful sentences, he told the whole story of the mission of Jesus. In this discourse concerning Jesus, there is a main line of argument twice interrupted by parenthetical explanation.

The words of my text constitute the first sentence in the first of these parentheses of exposition. Briefly, the discourse declared that Jesus of Nazareth was a Man, and that He was a Man approved of God unto those among whom He labored by the miracles and wonders which God wrought, approved that is as perfect in His humanity and therefore the instrument of those miracles and wonders and signs. Then the apostle declared that this man was delivered to death by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, and that He died at the hands of men who were without the law, to whom he had been handed over by the men of Israel. Thus he merged two truths concerning the Cross into one great declaration. It was the ultimate in sin, it was the ultimate in grace. The hands of lawless men crucified Him but this within the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

He then proceeded to declare that God raised this Jesus from the dead and had exalted Him to His own right Hand, and that as the result of that exaltation, the Spirit had been poured forth.

The first word of comment, I say, on the fact of the Resurrectlon, is this word of my text, "… it was not possible that He should be holden of it." Its note was that of exultant triumph. Imaginatively one can almost hear Peter saying, "… it was not possible that He should be holden of it." He! and as he thus referred to Him, there was within him the memory of the years he had spent in His company, the shame and sorrow of his own denial, the exultant joy of his own restoration, and supremely the sense of the new life and hope that had come to him by the way of the Resurrection. The whole fact of the Person of his Lord, dawning with new meaning upon his soul as the result of that Resurrection, was in his mind as he said, "He! " It was not possible that "… He should be holden of it." In the presence of that Resurrection fact, which had changed the man at the very center of his being, he spoke of death almost surely with contempt. "It."

Notice the declaration itself, and broadly first of all. It was a declaration made by this man illuminated by the Spirit, seeing things as he had never seen them; that God raised Jesus because it was necessary that He should do so. We may be very bold at this point and declare that here Peter affirmed that God was bound to raise Jesus from the dead. The character of God was involved, the nature of His law was at stake, the interest of eternal order was implicated. "… it was not possible that He should be holden of it." That such an One as He should lie in the power of death irrevocably was impossible. "… it was not possible that He should be holden of it." Then, having said so daring and so bold a thing, he halted for argument; and for argument he turned to one of the Psalms with which these men of Israel were so perfectly familiar. Citing from the sixteenth Psalm in our arrangement of the psalter - not exactly as we find the words there but from the Septuagint Version, which is exactly the same in spirit and in truth - he gave these words as constituting his argument for the declaration he made.

I beheld the Lord always before my face:

For He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved:

Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;

Moreover my flesh also shall dwell in hope:

Because Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades,

Neither wilt Thou give Thy Holy One to see corruption.

Thou madest known unto me the ways of life;

Thou shalt make me full of gladness with Thy countenance.

Then, proceeding, he gave the reason for this interpretation of the Psalm, declaring that when David wrote it, he was a prophet and had been lifted to the high places of vision. Looking down through the ages, he saw the fulfilment of God's Kingdom purposes, not in himself, not in his immediate successors, but in the Messiah, and singing through the ages he heard this song, the song of the Messiah.

In this Psalm then we have a revelation of the things that made the Resurrection necessary. First of all, without entering into a discussion as to the authorship of the psalm or as to its first meaning but accepting this inspired interpretation, let us look for a moment or two at its notes and declarations.

First observe the exultant joy of the singer.

My heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;

Moreover my flesh also shall dwell in hope.

And again:

Thou madest known unto me the ways of life;

Thou shalt make me full of gladness with Thy countenance.

The reading of the sentence is sufficient to establish the accuracy of the suggestion, that the Psalm is full of exultant joy. Now let us divide these sentences into two parts. First these three:

My heart was glad.

My tongue rejoiced.

My flesh also shall dwell in hope.

Second these:

Thou madest known unto me the ways of life;

Thou shalt make me full of gladness with Thy countenance.

Between the two sets of exultant notes, we find Hades, Sheol, the underworld of death and darkness, and so far as humanity was concerned, the underworld of despair; and through fear of which, man had all his lifetime been subject to bondage. The first assurances expressed in the declarations, "My heart was glad, my tongue rejoiced, my flesh shall dwell in hope," were assurances in view of Hades and the dark underworld. The second declarations, "Thou madest known unto me the ways of life, Thou shalt make me full of gladness with Thy countenance," are the result of the realization of the things anticipated. Here is a singer looking toward death who says, "My heart was glad, my tongue rejoiced, my flesh shall dwell in hope, for of this I am assured, Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades, nor suffer my soul to see corruption." The soul was approaching Hades and the flesh the grave, and yet the singer sings:

My heart was glad.

My tongue rejoiced.

My flesh also shall dwell in hope.

Then presently, without any reference to an historic event, the same voice is sounding on the other side of Hades.

Thou madest known unto me the ways of life;

Thou shalt make Me full of gladness with Thy countenance.

Now note most carefully that Peter quoted this Psalm on the day of Pentecost as having reference to the Cross and Resurrection. Peter, who had shunned the Cross not for himself but for his Lord, looking back on his Lord's pathway, understood in a moment the attitude of Jesus during the dark days during which He was approaching the Cross; the attitude of mind out of which proceeded such words as these: "Now is My soul troubled"; and such words as these: "My joy I give unto you." Strangely conflicting and apparently contradictory things, which Peter and the rest could not understand, were uttered during that wonderful progress toward Jerusalem which continued in spite of their dissuasions. Luke has chronicled that when He knew the days were well-nigh come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His Face to go. Peter, in the light of Pentecostal vision, discovered that in the heart of Jesus on all that shadowed pathway there was a song and this was the song:

My heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced:

Moreover my flesh also shall dwell in hope;

and at last Peter had heard spiritually, the song of the Lord upon the other side of Hades and the dark underworld:

Thou madest known unto me the ways of life;

Thou shalt make me full of gladness with Thy countenance.

Here then is more than the mere recitation of a poem. Here Peter had discovered the deep inner meaning of the death of Jesus and the Resurrection. In this song, he finds the clear declaration of the reason why Christ rose from among the dead.

We have then in the Psalm a revelation of the reason of the singer's joy. First: "I beheld the Lord always before my face." Second: "He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved." "Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh shall dwell in hope."

Such an One as set the Lord always before him, such an One as knew God always at his right hand, was able to say, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades, nor suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." Running through the whole of that Psalm quoted by Peter is a recognition of that which the Bible forever insists upon and which our Christian religion insistently proclaims, the relation between sin and death. Why this hope in the presence of the underworld? Why this hope as approach was made to the deep darkness? "I have set the Lord always before my face. He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved." In that twofold declaration we have the real secret of that which Peter now declared. "It was not possible that He should be holden of it."

In this word of Peter then there is a declaration of our Lord's victory in the realm of sin, and by the citation of this Psalm we are given an analysis of that victory. It was a three-fold victory that Jesus won over sin, a victory complete and making the Resurrection necessary.

First, the victory was victory over the possibility of originating evil. "I beheld the Lord always before my face" is the note, not so much of Jesus in His humanity as of Jesus in His relation to God as His Servant. Second, victory over evil as suggested to the soul from without; "For He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved." That is victory within the realm of human life and human nature. Finally, victory over evil as responsibility assumed. For I pray you, that where there is victory as the Servant over the possibility of originating evil and victory as a Man over the assault of evil as from without, there is no place for death in the life of such an One. Yet He descended to death and passed to Hades. In that act, He assumed responsibility;

He died to atone

For sins not His own.

Following Him into that underworld of evil and knowing Him as He was revealed by the Spirit and seen in the light of the Resurrection, Peter rose to the height of supreme and final affirmation as he said, "… it was not possible that He should be holden of it."

Let us look a little more closely at these things. First, I have declared that here is the affirmation of victory over the possibility of originating evil; "I beheld the Lord always before my face." We gaze with this man Peter upon Jesus of Nazareth, and we see in Him what Peter saw in Him and what those writers saw in Him, a new Creation, a new Being in human history. Man indeed, yet more than Man; God indeed, but God subject instead of Sovereign. We see Him, the One Who being on equality with God did not consider that equality a prize to be snatched at and held for His own enrichment or aggrandizement; the One Who in some unfathomable mystery emptied Himself and took the form of a Servant. There we halt. That self-emptying was His abandonment of the form and activity of sovereignty and the assumption of the form and activity of subservience. I have already done in a passing phrase what I will now do quite definitely. I admit the mystery. I may be wholly wrong, but the growing conviction of my soul is that we never shall account for these things by human philosophies; but the fact is a declared one, that this Son of God, the eternal, immediate Divine manifestation of God to others, Himself did stoop and bend from the form of Sovereignty to that of Service. In that act, an opportunity was created for a new genesis of evil, for in the moment when a will is placed under control, the possibility of disobedience is created.

Let us illustrate here for a moment, not in the realm of our own human life, but in the realm of angelic life as that is revealed to us in the word of truth. In the Epistle of Jude, we find these words: "… angels that kept not their own principality but left their proper habitation, …" That leaving of the proper habitation was not the penalty of sin but the act of sin. It was the volitional act whereby these angels exercised will as apart from the control of the Divine and in rebellion against the Divine.

It is impossible to conceive of a servant of God within whom that possibility does not exist. Now, listen to the language of the Psalm; "I have set the Lord always before my face." That is the language of One Who kept His principality by abiding in His habitation; the language of One Who never exercised His will under the constraint of personal desire; the language of One Who never turned His back upon God; "I have set the Lord always before my face." Therefore His heart was glad, therefore His tongue rejoiced, therefore His flesh dwelt in hope! Because He, in the divine economy and in the midst of those movements that came from the will of God, remained the Servant of God. He did not fall from His first estate by personal volition. There came no act of disobedience and no deflection from the high and awful integrity of unswerving submission to the will of God. That was perfect victory as the Servant of God.

The second phrase leads us a step further and perhaps brings us into more intimate relationship with the things of our own experience. Not only did He say, "I have set Jehovah ever before my face," but this also: "He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved." Quite simply we may declare that the first affirmation means, "I have not moved," while the second declaration is, "I have not been moved." The fall of Lucifer, son of the morning, was the fall of one who moved from his habitation. The fall of Adam was the fall of one who was moved from his habitation as the result of temptation from without. The fall of Satan, so far as that is revealed to us in Holy Scripture, was the fall of a servant in answer not to attacks from without, but to desire from within that turned his face from God. Said Jesus, "I have set the Lord always before My face." The fall of man was different. The sin of man was the response of man to the suggestion of evil that came from without. Now, says this Servant in the great Psalm, "He is on my right hand that I should not be moved." The vision here again is that of the Son of God, but also of the Son of Adam, united to the race. Mark the possibility created when He was born of the Holy Ghost and by the Virgin Mary. He came to stand where man stood at the beginning; not to stand where I stand by relationship to Adam, but to stand where Adam stood before Adam sinned; and therefore in the midst of opposing forces; in the midst of that dark underworld of evil. He came to stand in a place where it was possible to yield. Peter, looking back on the whole life, catches up the music of the Psalm and says the whole story of the Man Jesus is told thus: "He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved." He walked with God and so was upheld. He never exercised will under constraint of suggestion made by others whether high or low, good or evil. He never departed from the side of God, and all the allurements and all the assaults which were presented to His soul and beat against it from without, He mastered because He walked with God. Therefore His heart was glad, His tongue rejoiced, His very flesh dwelt in hope. Therefore, in Him there was neither fear of death nor anticipation of death as for Himself.

So we move to the last phase of this wonderful victory, the most wonderful of all for us men. Why was He glad? Read again the ancient song. He was glad because of the double triumph: "I have set the Lord always before me." "He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved." What was the chief cause of His gladness? Why was He glad because He had thus been victorious? He was glad because of the possibility created by this victory, of yet another victory more wonderful, more profound, more tremendous. He was glad because of the victory in life as creating the possibility of dying vicariously. He was crowned with glory and honor that He might taste death for every man; not because He tasted death for every man, but in order that He might do so. Death had no place in the order of His Being, but because His Being was perfect He was able to die for others. Consequently, there was not only the possibility of dying vicariously for others but of dying victoriously, knowing that when God carried Him into that realm in which He took over responsibility, He could not abandon Him. "… Thou wilt not leave my Soul in Hades, … Thou wilt not suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption. …" Even when the soul is in Hades and the body is in the grave, even when the personality is severed and divided by the mystery of death and is thus found in the land of shadows and the place of corruption, even there God cannot abandon. "… Thou wilt not leave my Soul in Hades, …" nor "… suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption,"

Now mark the fact of His dying and the element which we cited before in Peter's inspired declaration. He died by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, therefore He died in fellowship with God. The dying of Jesus was not conflict with God; it was no attempt in the darkness to persuade God to love, but rather cooperation in the darkness with God in order that Love might do His perfect work. Even in His dying He carried forward the double triumph of His living.

What was the first triumph? "I have set Jehovah always before my face. …" Cooperation with His will, yielding to it, and never answering the desire of His own soul. Listen to Gethsemane! "... not My will but Thine be done!" It is the same triumph in the face of death.

What was the triumph of His human life? The refusal to listen to any voice that suggested that He should depart from the Divine pathway. Listen to His answer to the suggestion that He should shun the Cross. "… Get thee behind Me, Satan, ... for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men." That answer was the measure of His devotion. So we see the double victory of His living operating in His dying, for in the mystery of death He is still the Servant of God, originating no evil, and a Man in right relationship with God refusing to listen to the suggestion of evil.

Again, in His dying, we see Him in cooperation with God, assuming responsibility for the sin of the race, and therefore by His dying creating moral values at the disposal of the race. What then is the victory in the case of such an One? That Hades cannot hold the soul though it possess it, that corruption cannot touch His Body though they lay Him in the grave. We have in this Death and Resurrection of Jesus that in human history which is unique. We cannot account for it by our science, and our philosophies cannot explain it. It was God's interference; God's new mysterious redeeming act; that One died whom Hades could not hold nor corruption touch; and all because of the victory He won over evil in every form. Therefore to Him God made known the ways of life, He was made full of gladness with the countenance of God.

On that Resurrection morning, when He did first reveal Himself to Mary of Magdala and throughout the day to other individual souls and through the forty days of His appearing and disappearing, He was flinging everywhere the sunshine of the gladness of His own heart because of the victory that He had won in His mastery of evil. The risen Lord is Victor over every conceivable form of essential evil, over the possibility of primal genesis from within His own life as the Servant of God. "I have set the Lord always before my face …"; over the possibility of evil resulting from the assault that comes from without; "Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved;" and over evil as responsibility assumed. Resurrection demonstrated that victory; "… it was not possible that He should be holden of it." Had death held Him then God had been defeated, or God had been involved. It was not possible that He should be holden of it.

If He be Victor over every conceivable form of essential evil, He is Victor ultimately over all the results of evil, suffering, sorrow, and sinning, as well as sin. How long that ultimate day seems to us in coming! The consciousness of evil remains. We know it, for death and sinning are still with us, and evil lifts its proud head even today threatening goodness. Ah! But my brethren, when that consciousness of evil threatens to oppress the heart overmuch, let us ever condition it by this fact of His victory over evil at its heart and center, knowing that we are taking part in an administrative warfare. The central battle has been fought and won.

If He rose not, then we are of all men most pitiable, for we have seen a vision and indulged a hope which is false. But not with the gloomy foreboding of any such suggestion do we end this meditation, but as men and women who remind our heart amid the travail and the toil that He is risen, and that because it was not possible that He should be holden of death.