**VOLUME 9; CHAPTER 13 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE TRAGEDY OF LIFE WITHOUT FAITH by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*

*Psalm 27:13*

THE PSALM FROM WHICH OUR TEXT IS TAKEN IS A SONG OF CONFLICTING emotions, in which victory is on the side of the nobler. As we listen to the singer we discover the opposing forces at war within the soul. Faith opposes itself to fear, joy strenuously contends with sorrow, songs resolutely lift themselves for the silencing of sighing.

The fear, the sorrow, the sighing are patent. Note the questions at the commencement of the psalm which even though they be prefaced by affirmations of faith, reveal the assault of fear, "… Whom shall I fear?" "… Of whom shall I be afraid?" Observe the tumult of circumstances as revealed in the phrases that run like a dirge through the psalm; evil doers came to seek to eat up my flesh; mine adversaries and my foes. An host against me; war against me! The day of trouble! Mine enemies round about me! My father and my mother have forsaken me. Mine enemies, mine adversaries, false witnesses, such as breathe out cruelty! There can be no escape from the sense of the tumult and trouble in the midst of which the singer lived.

Nevertheless, the Psalm in its entirety has not made this impression upon the heart of man. It is pre-eminently a Psalm of faith, of joy, of song. Note the affirmations with which it opens. "The Lord is my light and my salvation … the Lord is the strength of my life" - or even better, more accurately - "the Lord is the (stronghold) of my life." Observe the affirmations answering the questions. My heart will not be afraid! I will be confident! Mine head shall be lifted up! I will sing, yea, I will sing!

Then observe, after the opening stanzas of praise, the prayer that breaks from the heart of the singer, and notice how through the brief prayer there throbs the note of perfect confidence mastering that of overwhelming pain!

Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice:

Have mercy also upon me, and answer me.

When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said unto Thee;

Thy face, Lord, will I seek.

Hide not Thy face far from me;

Put not Thy servant away in anger:

Thou hast been my help;

Leave me not , neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.

When my father and my mother forsake me,

Then the Lord will take me up. Teach me Thy way, O Lord;

And lead me in a plain path, Because of mine enemies.

Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies …

For false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty.

Finally consider the last stanza of the Psalm, marking well its appeal;

Wait on the Lord:

Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart:

and let thy heart take courage;

Wait, I say, on the Lord.

The spiritual experience revealed in this song is one which, I venture to affirm, we all most earnestly desire. The tumult of sorrow we know. Is the triumph possible? Is it possible to know triumph in the midst of such tumultuous circumstances of grief? We wonder, we question, we doubt. Our sorrows are so subtle, our pain is so poignant, our difficulties are so complex, our circumstances are so peculiar.

Well, let us consider the reason of this singer's triumph. It is, of course, declared in the opening affirmations -

The Lord is my light and my salvation; …

The Lord is the stronghold (strength) of my life …

It is illustrated in many subsequent statements which I have already quoted. From the standpoint of the soul's experience, the secret is most forcefully revealed in the words of my text. "*l had fainted*, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

A critical examination of the text seems at first destructive of its simplest meaning. You will observe that in the Revised Version and the Authorized, the first three words are italicized; "I had fainted …" In Miles Coverdale's translation, that wonderful version that has been, thank God, preserved for us in the Book of Common Prayer, the phrase has yet more of emphasis, "I should utterly have fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." There also, the whole of the words are italicized. These words constitute an exegetical gloss, introduced by the translators to fill up some gap, some hiatus, to complete the sense of the text. As a matter of fact we must omit them, if we are to be careful in our consideration of the text.

What have we left? "… Unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." When we yet further examine the text, we find that the word "unless" is not found in some manuscripts; neither is it found in the Septuagint, in the Syriac, or in the Vulgate. In the manuscripts in which the word is found, in the Massoretic Text, it is dotted over and beneath, which suggests that it is a spurious word.

As to the first words, "I had fainted," we certainly must omit them. The word "unless," I am not prepared to omit. The absence of it from some manuscripts is not conclusive evidence. As old Hengstenberg suggests with quaint humor, the Massorites evidently lost their feet at this point. The sense of the passage demands the word. The statement without it is incongruous, following as it does immediately after the words, "… false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty." When the word is retained the whole text becomes a gasp, an exclamation! It is an imperfect sentence, indeed, no sentence at all, but a cry which is almost a groan. It is completed by a revealing hiatus, an eloquent silence. "… Unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!" Then the translators attempted to fill this gap, and inserted the words, "I had fainted," or "I had utterly fainted." I can understand why they put them in. They were trying to write what the man was thinking. He did not do so. He left the blank, suggesting a something that could not be expressed. "I had fainted! " Nay, verily, that is altogether too weak. The horror was greater than that. There are moments in which the soul cannot faint. That is the sense of my text. This man who sings so finely, whose music marches to major strains, all the while mastering the minor, pauses and reveals the deep secret of major music in this half-finished exclamation: "… Unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." The horror is too profound for words; the terror is too terrible for utterance. It is nameless.

This, then, is a brief word of wonderful unveiling of the soul's consciousness of some lonely singer in the long ago, perchance David, more probably Hezekiah, I know not - but of some soul who had been looking out upon life. Poetically referring to the thing upon which he looked by the phrase, "The land of the living," a phrase describing the earth as he saw it, the dwelling place of men; he said: "Unless I had seen more than the land of the living, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord there - ! "

Leaving from this moment the peculiarly personal notes of the psalm, let us consider the essential thoughts of the text along two lines, first, the land of the living as it appears in itself; second, the land of the living as it appears in the light which is here described as the goodness of the Lord.

First then, the land of the living as it appears in itself. We must introduce this line of meditation by reminding ourselves of the viewpoint. It is not that of childhood. Childhood never sees the land of the living as this man saw it. Childhood, thank God, is beneficently sheltered and cannot see the things that some of us see so clearly and so tragically today. No child looks tragically upon life. Oh God! must I not amend that to say no child ought to do so! I fear there are some children who do, but it is not the natural viewpoint of the child.

Once again, it is not the natural viewpoint of youth. As Browning sang, "Youth sees but half." Youth is only intended to see half. It has not yet seen life in its entirety.

This is the viewpoint of that which, for lack of a better term, I may describe as maturity, the viewpoint of the man or the woman who has been compelled to face all the facts of life, who has passed through childhood's years with their sweetness and their softness, their laughter and their fun, who has gone beyond the golden age of youth, who has seen the colors fade upon the eastern sky and has tramped under the grey or under the blazing heat.

What, then, are the experiences of such? The land of the living is to them the place of weakness. There comes to us inevitably sooner or later this overwhelming sense of inability. We look back over the pathway we have traveled. We look at the things we have done, and looking back, we note how imperfect they all have been. We look carefully at the things we are doing today, and the sense of imperfection is even more appalling in the presence of immediate service than when we look at that which has been rendered. Then, ah, then, we look on, and there are so many things to be done which we shall never do, intentions that will never be fulfilled, work that has to be dropped and left and cannot be carried out. Not that the work does not need doing, not that the intention was not glorious, not that the vision was untrue, but that we are unable to do it. The appalling sense of inability, incompetence, weakness!

The land of the living is the place of disappointment. The sense of disillusionment comes inevitably to the human soul. We become disappointed with ourselves; we become disappointed in others. We become disappointed in the matter of our hopes and our aspirations. Many of them are not realized; and those we do realize, are they ever what we thought they would be? Are we ever satisfied? Is it not so, that when we have climbed the mountain height upon which we set our eyes and towards which we have striven strenuously, we are disappointed because there stretches away beyond us other mountain heights shutting us in, and we have not reached the level we thought we should have reached when that mountain height was climbed.

The land of the living is the place of mystery. Oh! this tangle of human life; the injustice of things; the perplexing problems that fret the soul; the thousand questions that perpetually force themselves out of the agony of life and find no answer. By mystery are we hemmed in; we do not know; we cannot explain; and the sense grows upon us with the passing of the years.

The land of the living is the place of sin. I use the word resolutely. Employ any other term that may better help you. However much we may argue concerning it, and whatever philosophy we may employ to attempt to explain it, there is this appalling consciousness of that which is wrong, out of joint, and not out of joint merely, but diseased withal. The terrific sense of the presence of the poison, of its power, and its pollution.

Again, and let this be the last word in the dark and dreary outlook, the land of the living is the place of death. Death, indiscriminating, ruthless, ghastly! Do you tell me that you have lost your hatred of death? Then you are abnormal, and your abnormality is not the abnormality of health but of disease! Death is ghastly, death is hateful! Death that touches the little child in its sweetness, and the child is gone! Death, that strikes down the standard-bearer at the head of the army and leaves a gap that cannot be filled! Death, that by some accident or catastrophe sweeps upon the soldiers of the Cross and the servants of sin alike and engulfs them together so that the place that knew them knows them no more.

Unless there is something more to say than all that, what a tragedy life is, what a horror! The land of the living, this life in the midst of which we find ourselves, without God, what does it mean? No final wisdom or knowledge; no adequate strength to deal with things; no authority that moves right onward toward a goal; no possibility of restoration. I do not wonder that this singer gasped out, "… Unless I had believed! …"

But the gasp was but an interlude in a song. Let us then look again at the land of the living as it appears in the light of the goodness of the Lord. Immediately we are halted by a phrase that suggests a truth, "… the goodness of the Lord!" The truth suggested by the phrase is that of the Lord of goodness, the biblical conception of God, the conception of God which inspired this song, the conception which inspired all the songs of this great Psalter. Shining through the whole of them in their unveiling of the human soul is the light of the God of revelation, the God of the Bible.

Goodness is one of the richest words in our vocabulary if we will but interpret it by the teaching of the biblical revelation. A. greater word than holiness is this, a finer word than righteousness, including both, but having other qualities, which suffuse them with light and tenderness and mercy. The Hebrew word here so translated means radical and fundamental rightness, but it was a word that was used and translated by other words, beauty, gladness, prosperity. The Lord of goodness is the Lord of all that is right, all that is beautiful, all that is glad, and all that makes for the true prosperity of human life. He is the Lord of goodness, for He is the fountain head from which all these things proceed and the means by which these things become real in the experience of the race.

What light does this fact of God fling upon this strange, weird, life of ours? How does it help us? In what sense does belief in this God turn the sighing into the song, the fear into faith, the sorrow into joy? What are the things that make the triumph note of a song like this that thrills with pain?

I affirm in the first place that in the light of this revelation we come to understand that life is related to Him, and therefore that it is greater than all its experiences; creating their possibilities, but refusing to be exhausted in them. There is a saying of Jesus which we quote perpetually, and never perhaps without seeing some new light in it. "And this is age-abiding life" - that is life which is the life of the age, which cannot be destroyed in an age, or exhausted in an age, which runs through the whole of them, and touches them, and changes them, but is not changed by them - "to know Thee, the only true God. …" Now mark what this means in the case of human life. In the light of this revelation I come to the profound consciousness that my life is greater than all its experiences.

Life itself, whatever mystery it may have to face, whatever pain it may have to endure, whatever darkness it may have to go through, whatever agony it may have to bear, whatever sins it may have to mourn, life is vast, It is a Divine creation, and it is thus to this very God of goodness. Therefore, all these experiences of life, being related to Him, take on a new meaning, have a new value, have a new suggestiveness.

I have said that the land of the living is the place of weakness, that we become conscious of inability. In the light of this revelation of man's relationship to God, we discover that the sense of inability is a suggestion of possibility. I cannot do these things, and yet they are things that are to be done and can be done. The fact that I have seen the vision of them is in itself worthwhile. Human life will be measured presently and ultimately not by what it has achieved, but by what it set itself out to achieve, which, if it but be related to God, it will achieve in spite of all the darkness and the apparent disappointment of the present hour. That I know my own weakness is a sign of my own power. That I know there are things I do not know is a sign of my capacity to know the things I do not know. When a man says, "I cannot know the Infinite," in that acknowledgment he confesses that he knows it. He cannot include all the facts that are within it within his present consciousness. But to recognize the Infinite is in some sense to know it. That is at once a demonstration of relationship to God and a result of relationship to God. It would be a dark day indeed for the race if men became satisfied with the things that they have done and the things they are doing and imagined that when they had done their piece of work, all work had forever been completed. It is this very sense of inability which becomes the inspiration of endeavor for it rises out of a sense of possibility.

Again, the experience of the land of the living as a place of disappointment is after all but a demonstration of high possibilities to the man who has seen the face of God and rejoiced in the light. Noble disappointment is a demonstration of the splendor of things seen although never realized. Art thou disappointed with thyself tonight? Then know this, that if thou hast seen a vision of thyself which is finer and higher, in the seeing there was value. The goodness of the Lord in the land of the living is that which makes a man, broken and disappointed with himself, look up into the Face of Deity and resolutely and daringly say, "Thou wilt perfect that which concerneth me. If you take that away from me, then I despair in the midst of life. But leave me that, and,

With spirit elate,

The mire and the fog I press through,

For heaven shines under the cloud

Of the day that is after to-morrow."

If the land of the living be the place of mystery, to the man who has seen the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living or who believes to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, the very fact of mystery is but the expression of profounder things, greater and more glorious. In the twilight of the Jewish Dispensation, the great founder, the lawgiver, uttered words that are to us today fresh and wonderful because of their immediate value; "The secret things" are the things that fill the soul with fear, the things of that realm of mystery which lies about us in life; the problems that confront us; the questions we ask and no answer comes; the secret things! Well, what of them? "They belong to the Lord, and the revealed things are for us and for our children." When we believe to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, we know that there are no secret things from Him, that what we know not, He knows, that what amazes us never amazes Him, that the things for which we find no solution lie naked and open to His vision. Then if there are things which assault us and we cannot understand why they are permitted, the fact that they are permitted no longer troubles us, for He has permitted them, and He can make no mistake. The whole problem of evil lies there illuminated, and there and there alone the heart can find its rest.

The land of the living is the land of sin. The consciousness of sin is born of the conviction of holiness. Apart from the conviction of holiness there is no consciousness of sin. Then let us remember that in the full biblical revelation of God, at the very heart and center of the awful holiness that appals us, there burns and flames the infinite compassion which becomes passion and acts there-through for the saving of sinning souls. Woe is me, I am a sinner! Unless I believe to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living! But believing that and seeing that and knowing God, then even my sin shall not make me afraid!

And what of death? Our protest against death is the protest of life, and our horror of death is the horror of health. When once we see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, we discover that death is not in His original intention for humanity. The scientists may tell us it is but the fulfilment of the natural order. We affirm that it is the carrying out of an unnatural condition resulting from human sin, that there should not have been any place for death had there been no failure and no sin. The goodness of the Lord in the land of the living transfigures the sackcloth and declares that through death there is the life, and beyond death there is a resurrection. If you take these things away from me, then death is still a horror so terrible that the only relief from it is in itself. I am not surprised that men who lose the Face of God end their lives, "… unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living! " Without that light, life is not worthwhile; life is a tragedy. Blot out this God from the heavens, deny me the Deity of the Face that shines in human tenderness for the unveiling of the Divine, take this God of the Bible away from me, then life is some hideous mockery and sport of demons. Unless! Oh! the horror of it, the nameless horror of it! Fainted? Nay, the soul becomes too quick and alive, with very agony and despair, challenge and revolt, hot anger and rebellion, ever to faint. Rebellion against what? Against the tragedy, the weakness, the disappointment, the mystery, the sin, and the death, the whole dark outlook!

Ah! but we have believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living; we have believed because we have seen the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, and we believe still to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. We believe that all the things which in themselves fill the soul with fear are held in the grip and grasp of the Great Father of an infinite grace.

At last there will be some explanation of all the pain and the mystery and the disappointment.

What then is to be the true attitude of the soul? Let the psalmist tell us as he ends his song.

"… Wait on the Lord." Or as the American version has it, "…Wait for the Lord. Be strong, and let thine heart take courage. Yea, wait thou for the Lord."

Those who have seen the Face of God are those who have seen it in the Face of Jesus. This is the ultimate in the biblical revelation. Through all the Old Testament we have prophecies, hopes, gleams of light, rosy flecks of a dawn yet to be. Would we view God's brightest glory? we must look in Jesu's Face! To the soul who has seen the Face of God in the Face of Jesus, faith is forever against fear, joy lays hold upon sorrow, and songs rise up against sighing.

What then is the condition? Wait! There is nothing more difficult to do. It is much easier to work for God than to wait for God. To dare in active service is a far less wearisome thing than to wait, and yet by waiting the victory comes as well as the vision.

Moses, nurtured in the Court of Pharaoh, came to an hour when there was born within him a passion to deliver. What was his mistake? The mistake of imagining that in the hour when that passion was born, he was able to do the thing he desired to do. He had to wait for forty years. He always had to wait. In the hour of the wondrous deliverance, when by plague and judgment God set His people free, Moses did no other than wait. It is by waiting upon the Lord that the victory will be won. His goodness will be seen in the land of the living in proportion as His people wait upon Him.

I repeat as I finish, that this outlook is not that of childhood, and the final message is not for the child; the outlook is not that of youth, and the final message is not for youth.

The outlook is that of the men and women who have looked at life, looked at it all, and who if they have had nothing other to look at than life, have gasped with horror and been faint with fear! If such have believed to see the goodness of the Lord, then He teaches them this lesson, that in their waiting, they give Him His opportunity to work. He worketh for him that waiteth for Him.