**VOLUME 9; CHAPTER 20 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE HARVESTS OF THE WORD OF GOD by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

*Isaiah 55:10-11*

THE FITNESS OF THE SYMBOLISM OF THIS TEXT IS APPARENT even to the most casual observer.

Snow and rain are characterized by gentleness which merges into force. One drop of rain falls upon my hand, and I brush it away, and it is not; but when the drop is multiplied and the great storm sweeps along the valley, it is almost resistless in its onrush. One feathery flake of snow falls through the atmosphere. I touch it and it passes and is lost, its crystal beauty destroyed forever by the rudeness of my human hand; but let that flake be multiplied and the falling snow will take hold of the thundering locomotive, clog its wheels, check its progress, bury it beneath its soft and noiseless whiteness.

Rain and snow are characterized by helplessness which grows into beneficence. We ask: "What can this drop of rain do for man? What can this flake of snow do for humanity?" And yet we know that when we pass from the individual drop to the great rain, that this in falling makes the earth laugh back in harvest and crowns the labor of the hands of men. There is no more exquisite word in all Scripture about nature than that simple and sublime passage: "He giveth His snow like wool." Like a warm mantle, it wraps the earth in winter time and keeps it from the penetration of intenser cold. And so we find that rain and snow, helpless as they seem, are the very messengers of beneficence to men.

Again, rain and snow come to us characterized by unfruitfulness, yet generating fruitfulness wherever they fall. Life cannot be sustained by the one or the other. Neither is there in either any element of reproductiveness. Yet in their cooperation with the forces of "old mother earth" and with the ministries of light and air, all that is needed for life's sustenance is produced.

This is but a surface application of the truth. As we watch the rain and the snow and think upon it more carefully, we find a most suggestive symbol of the Word of God. By the Word of God at this moment I mean all that phrase can possibly mean; the written Which reveals the Living, the Living Which seals the written; the written Which is still ours, the Living Which lies behind it and speaks through it in power to the sons of men.

This Word of God in the history of the race, what has it been? Symbols becoming substance, letters advancing to life, that which has seemed to kill becoming, presently, that which has bestowed life everywhere. In order that we may understand the value of this Word of God and learn the true method of appreciation of such value, let us take this symbolism of the prophet and consider it exactly as he has stated it; first, as to the similarities suggested; second, as to the principles revealed; and finally, as to the responsibility entailed.

Let me first tabulate the phrases which we are to consider in this verse: "Cometh from heaven; returneth not thither; watereth the earth; maketh it bring forth, and bud; that it may give seed to the sower; and bread to the eater."

The rain and the snow come from heaven. Man has nothing to do with the coming of the rain and the snow. You will remember how in that great theophany of the Book of Job when, after the human eloquence of his friends has providentially been silenced, God Himself begins to speak to the suffering man. He speaks to him in the midst of his sorrow and his suffering by making all His glory in creation pass before him. In the midst of that wonderful questioning of Job by God occur these two inquiries; "Hast thou entered into the treasuries of the snow ...? " which, being translated from poetry into prose means, do you understand the snow? Do you know from whence it comes? Can you analyze the mystery of its crystallization and deposit? Then, "Hath the rain a father …?" which, by some process of translation means, are you able to generate it, to produce it? With those questions in mind, let me read again this statement of the prophet. "For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, …" The Word of God is a message from God to man which no man was able to find out for himself. It is never a philosophy formulated by human wisdom; it is always a revelation made, a something declared that man could not by searching find out. The supreme quality of the Word of God is that however men may occupy their time in discussing the methods by which we have come into possession of these documents, there is stamped upon every page of them the sign manual of Jehovah. They are great unveilings of His nature, great revelations of the deepest secrets of human life, great illumination of the problems that confront men by Divine revelation. The Word of God is the gift of God and not the contrivance of man.

But it "… returneth not thither. ..." The snow and the rain pour themselves out on the face of the earth, they melt and pass, and within a very few hours of the great rainfall, which has sweetened everything in its coming, the roads are dusty again and we say, "How soon the rain has passed." So also, soon after the snow has once come under the influence of the sun, it is gone. It has seemed to pour itself out in magnificent waste. Judged by first appearances, it seems as though this gift of heaven had been poured upon earth to be spoiled, contaminated, soiled, wasted.

So also with the Word of God. The Word of God has been given to men in figure and symbol, in prophecy and song, and at last in the Person of Jesus, and since He came, in exposition and explanation, for centuries; and, ah, me! how perpetually it seems to us as we watch the openings and processes of the decades and even of the centuries, as though this great outpouring of Divine revelation was lost, falling upon man only to be spoiled. How often have we thought of it as wasted? Nay, have we not thought so of it sometimes when we have been preaching it? Have we not looked out with almost passionate desire upon audiences that have listened and passed away apparently to frivolity and forgetfulness and have said, Yea, verily, "as the snow and the rain from heaven ... but it returneth not thither"? That is the first effect upon us after observing what happens as God gives His Word.

But there is another statement needed to complete and explain this; it "... watereth the earth …" Take this dust as it lies upon the highway and over the furrowed field, and know that within the dust is the making of everything that is beautiful and fruitful. But the dust does not of itself laugh in flowers; it is capable and incapable. Lying within it are all the forces of life. All the mysterious magnificence of your personality on the physical side lies within the dust at your feet, and all flowers that bloom lie there in potentiality. As the rain and snow water the earth, which is at once characterized by capacity and yet unable to fulfil the possibilities that lie sleeping within its own being, it makes all nature laugh with new beauty.

So also the Word of God comes to men in whose nature are the potentialities but not the realizations. The Word of God falls upon the centuries, upon society, upon individuals, and we thought it touched them but to be spoiled and soiled and pass, but we watched and we found that by its falling the soil became productive. There is in every human being the capacity for Deity. There is in every human life the potentialities of the highest and the noblest and the best. I am not discussing the question of man's ruin. I know the ruin; I know it in my own life. But that which is ruined is not destroyed. Without some beneficent ministry external to itself it will be destroyed. Given that ministry it is still capable of realization. The very ministry it needs is that of the Word of God. As is the rain, as is the snow to the dust, so is the Word of God to humanity in its ruin. God has not been wasting His Word. As He has given it by prophets, seers, and psalmists, by His Son, in many a symbol and by many a sign, in many a dispensation; given it to the mocking, laughing, scoffing crowds; He knows that in all the dust that lies about Him there are potentialities; and as He gives His rain and snow to smite the dust into laughter, so He has given His Word that the Word coming to men may touch the unrealized capacity into realization.

The prophet now adds a further truth concerning these elements in the statement, "… maketh it bring forth, …" After the rain and the snow the dull russet ground becomes beautiful with emerald and opal and ruby and diamond, and thus we know that when God's rain and snow touch the dust it makes the dust bring forth.

So with the Word of God. The Word of God makes the dormant forces in man move to fulfilment. All men that have ever realized the possibilities of their own life have done so in response to some part of the Word of God, to the Word spoken, to the Word written, to the Word lived, to the revelation granted; and as the snow and rain coming upon the earth make the earth answer by bringing forth, so the Word of God in the centuries, as they come and go, has provoked into realization the dormant capacities of life.

Yet another word that I have taken separately, because I think it really is separate. It is a stronger word than the former - "… maketh it bring forth, and bud, …" I feel inclined to use here the literal Hebrew word, "and sprout." That is to say, the rain and the snow not merely touch the dust into generation but actually come again in the grass, the flowers, the fruitage. You saw that rainstorm as it swept the field yonder. You watched it come; you smiled at the helplessness of the first few drops as they fell. You were appalled at the rush of the storm as the clouds broke and swept that field. Then you watched it as the clouds passed and the sun shone. As you watched the field it seemed as though all was lost and of no avail, and you went to sleep - and God gives unto His beloved in sleep - and you came back again and looked at your field, and there was the sheen of the emerald all over it. First the blade and then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear, and so on and on, until russet had become green and green had become golden harvest. And in that waving harvest of gold what do I find? The rain that I thought lost, the snow that I thought perished. It touched the dust with the alchemy of God, and it brought back the glorious, gracious harvest.

It is equally true that the Word of God that He has been giving for centuries has never been lost. It has come from Him to touch the failure of human life, and it has been returning to Him laughing with the harvest of ransomed souls. The Word was incarnate in the Christ supremely, and in a less and different degree but nevertheless as truly, God's Word has been re-incarnate in human lives in all the passing centuries. Do not let us be afraid of the word. I make no comparison finally between the incarnation of our blessed Lord and the incarnation of truth in the life of the believer. Nevertheless, in degree every Christian soul is a re-incarnation of the Word Who became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. Is it not so? That which is true and beautiful and of good report in you, in others, what is it but God's great Word which has touched the fibre of your being and reconstructed your broken lives to the realization of His purpose and so to the glory of His Name. The transmuted rain makes the earth not only generate by the touch of beneficence; it makes it sprout and bud and answer back in harvest. So also, the Word re-incarnate in believing souls is the harvest of the earth which supremely satisfies the heart of God.

Yet that is not all. "… that it may give seed to the sower, …" What is this harvest for? You say for the sustenance of human life. That is not the first thing. What is the harvest for? "That it may give seed to the sower" comes before "bread to the eater." Bread to the eater is a secondary thing. Bread to the eater is provision for the toiler that he may continue his sowing and reap his harvests. But the first thing is that, in the new form in which the rain and snow return to God, there is always found the potentiality of propagation waiting for new showers and new transmutations and new harvests. This is the perpetual story of the harvests as they come and go. Always first, seed to the sower.

So with the Word of God. The Word of God taking hold of human life, changing it, becoming incarnate in it, communicates propagative power; it makes a new wealth of seed which may be scattered still further afield. From every life re-made and sanctified by the Word of God, there must go forth the seed that will affect yet other fields and stretch out toward the consummating glory of the final harvest.

Finally we come to the last phase of the symbolism, "… and bread to the eater." The issue then is also sustenance to the toiler. The man that plowed and sowed and reaped, feeds. So surely also is it with this Word of God. It comes, as we have seen for the larger purpose, the creation of new seed that may be scattered still for the uplifting of man, but the Word of God is also the bread of life to the toiler. By it his own life is sustained, both in health and strength, and so he is enabled for the service for which he is created and to which he is called.

Let me pass now from these similarities to take the broader outlook and consider the great principles that are revealed.

The symbolism of this great prophetic Word teaches me, first of all, that the Word of God is purposeful. Rain and snow come certainly not for nothing and not for the display of their own wonders but for purpose. The symbolism teaches me, second, that the Word of God is powerful. The rain and snow come to victory always; they are never defeated. And the symbolism of my text teaches me, finally, that the Word of God is prosperous. It accomplishes, it prospers, as do also rain and snow.

The Word of God is purposeful. All this is seen by the various similarities which we have rapidly surveyed. The Word of God is not given to be possessed; it is given that it may possess. The truth of God is not given that men may hold it. Oh, I am tired of the men that want to know if I "hold the truth." Of course I don't "hold the truth"; no man can "hold the truth." It is too big for any man to hold, and God has never given His Word to men that they may "hold the truth." The facts are truly stated in quite another way. The truth must hold the man, wrap him around, change the very fibre of his being, permeate his complete life, and unless the Word of God is doing that for me it is failing in the first intention that God has for it. Not for our good only does it come. It is seed as well as bread. Unless we come to receive the Word as the earth takes the sun and the rain, then I am not sure that we had better not absent ourselves from every occasion when the Word is opened. If I come with my notebook to write down all I can learn about the Word of God in order that I may know it, then I am absolutely failing. But if I come to strip from my soul all the things that hide me that the Word of God may search me, if I have come to lay my life out in the light of the Word that the Word may correct it, then I shall find the Word in me is fruitful as is the snow, as is the rain upon the earth. It is a purposeful thing.

Then, thank God, it is powerful. He says it shall not return to Him void. And why not? May I not reverently say as in the presence of the inspired declaration, God's Word never returned to Him void because it never comes void from Him. Do you remember the word of the angel to the blessed Virgin? - "... no word of God is void …" Every word of God thrills with fruitfulness. If we but know how to receive it and how to respond to it, then it shall return to Him not void but fruitful, in lives changed, remolded, re-fashioned, sanctified.

And finally, then the Word of God is prosperous. It is so because it is His Word. "It shall not return unto me void, but it shall …" - and mark the two words - "… accomplish … prosper …" The word "accomplish" means it does something, it makes something, it realizes something; and the Hebrew word "prosper" literally means it "pushes forward." It is a great dynamic force. It is prosperous, moreover, by selection. "… that which I please, ... the thing whereto I sent it."

These are the principles which we must bear in mind as we take up our Bibles and come to listen to the teachings of the Word of God. It is given for a purpose; it is full of power; it accomplishes the purpose by reason of the power.

In conclusion, it is important that we inquire as to the responsibilities that are entailed? Rain and snow might fall upon the earth a long time, and there be no harvest unless the earth is prepared. The rain and snow may fall in all their prodigal munificence and magnificence upon the earth, and there will be no harvest unless the seed is sown. And rain and snow may fall and make the earth laugh with harvest if the earth be ready and the seed be sown, and yet men get no benefit unless the harvest be reaped, the seed be sown again, and through the process the bread be eaten.

Here, then, are three things at least that I would say: the earth must be prepared; take heed how ye hear. The seed must be sown; preach the Word. The bread must be eaten; let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.

Take heed how ye hear. In all tenderness and yet with great earnestness and great conviction, I would sound that word in the hearing of all. Take heed how ye hear. How shall we hear? Prayerfully, obediently, and in faith. The spirit of criticism never produces the result of power. Let us pray that in our lives God will plow up the fallow ground, give us the receptive heart, the child heart, willingness to hear and learn, deliver us from preconceived notions and prejudice, make us ready when He speaks to obey, make us simple-hearted at His feet, for as the rain and snow demand an earth plowed, broken, prepared, so does the Word of God demand a condition in those who hear, if it is to bring forth a harvest.

The true seed must be sown, and it must be by the preaching of the Word if the work is to be done. We are not to criticize the Word of God, not to account for the Word of God, not to defend the Word of God. We are to preach it and hear it. And there is a yet fuller application of that truth. The final preaching of the Word is not that of the lips but that of the life. Fundamentally the Word is the seed in the hearts of men, but functionally for the sake of the world, the seed is the sons of the Kingdom, the men in whom the Word has had its true effect.

Finally, the Word, the bread that comes, must be eaten or the toiler will grow weak. We are to let this Word of Christ dwell in us, take it into our life. The Word must come into the intellect, the emotion, the will; and when we take the Word of God into our whole life and answer its every claim, then in that moment God's purpose will be fulfilled in us.

One of the greatest instruments of God in the world today is the British and Foreign Bible Society. It sends out no preachers, but it accompanies the preacher with his message in the tongue of the people to whom he goes. It cannot issue statistics of conversion, but it pours forth the great stream of living water over all the earth and by such action quenches the thirsts of humanity as with the river of God. Alone, however, it would soon fail. As the Word circulates it becomes the sustenance of human lives, and so over earth's wilderness wastes the green appears which merges at last into the golden glory of the harvests of the Word of God.