**VOLUME 10; CHAPTER 01 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**SHORT BEDS AND NARROW COVERINGS by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.*

*Isaiah 28:20*

THIS THE LANGUAGE OF A FINE SATIRE. AT THIS POINT THE prophet, burning in anger, indulged in sarcasm. It was caustic and severe, but behind it throbbed the great heart of the man who was carrying the burden of his people's sin and attempting to lead them from the folly of their unbelief and rebellion back again to allegiance to God.

To understand this text in its final application and in its perpetual meaning, we must consider the context. The prophet was addressing a people who had been created as a people by God, a people who had been familiar from childhood with the law and with the testimony. He was addressing a people, moreover, who owed all their material prosperity to Him. Yet, he was speaking to a people whose life in its underlying impulses and its perpetual mode was the life of godlessness. The greatest difficulty confronting the prophet as he delivered his message was not the mere fact of the godlessness of the people, but that of the form this godlessness had taken. It was that of self-satisfied contempt for all that he had to say concerning the claim of God and God's methods in judgment. Intellectually, these men had not abandoned belief in God, but, practically, they had abandoned the truth concerning God. They still believed in Him, but they did not believe in His immediate government.

The whole story of the prophet Isaiah, as it is revealed to us in this one book, is that of a man who spoke to an inattentive age or to an age which, if attentive, mocked him and refused to obey his message, until, as the prophetic period drew to a close, he inquired in anguish, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

In this twenty-eighth chapter we have a tremendous and terrific utterance concerning the judgment of God; and as we read it carefully, we discover the interruptions of the mocking rulers. We hear the contemptuous speech of the men who listened to him but declined to believe the things he said. The prophetic message is always that of the government of God. Occasionally this man - who was a man of heart and a man of tears, a man who understood the suffering of the Divine heart, and foretold more perfectly than any other prophet of the old economy how, in the fulness of time, the suffering of the Divine heart would have its expression in the suffering Servant of God - occasionally this man broke out into denunciation, fierce and terrible; announced that God is not only the God of mercy, but also a God of judgment, in the sense of vengeance and punishment of sin. Every now and then, this man of tears became a man of thunder; this man - whose heartbeat seems as though it reverberated through the centuries until it found its perfect harmony with the heartbeat and the heartbreak of the Son of God - declared another side of the Divine nature; told men of God's "strange act" of judgment. Judgment as punishment is contrary to the Divine wish, but nevertheless part of the Divine will, that which God would never do, if man did not compel Him to the doing.

The answer of the men of that time is clearly brought out in the particular chapter in which our text occurs. These men taunted the prophet. A careful reading of the chapter shows that he repeated what they said. These are the words of the men who had heard his message, words uttered in regard to him, Isaiah; words that reveal their contempt for him: *"Whom will he teach knowledge? and whom will he make to understand the message? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts?"*

Then follows a revelation of what they objected to in his message, and the voice of their scorn is heard. They said, *"For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little."*

If I may interpret the attitude of these men by the language of our own days, they said, "This kind of preaching is out of date! Whom is he trying to teach knowledge? Let him talk to children! This halting method, of precept upon precept, of line upon line, of here a little and there a little, is of no use."

"Whom will he teach knowledge?" says the advanced age! "Whom does he imagine he can convince?" says the intellectual giant, who may be a moral leper. So the men of his day contemned the prophet. Then he told them of judgment. He thundered of the Divine government. They said, "We are not afraid! We have made a covenant with death! We have entered into a covenant with hell." Then the passion of the prophet blazed, and he said to them, "… Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." There shall be no fever, no fret, no fear, for that man! But beyond that, what? The scourge is also coming; the hail shall beat, the whirling flood shall sweep across, and "your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; …"

Then it was that he said: *"For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it."* In other words, I have told you of Divine government, I have announced the Divine judgment. You try to find rest by declaring that you have made an agreement with death, a covenant with hell. The bed is too short for you. You have never rested on it yet. The cold and biting windstorm will sweep upon you, and the covering will not keep you warm. You cannot rest on the beds you are making. You cannot hide in the covers in which you are attempting to wrap yourselves.

We are thus brought face to face with the principle that underlies the text. This age is very much like that age, but I am not proposing to make any wide application of this great message. I bring it down to its individual application, and I want to say two things, the first with all brevity, the second at greater length, and close with a return to the first.

The first thing I want to say is this: "Behold," said God through Isaiah, and says God to us today, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." That is the first thing. I say it briefly now. I will return to it in conclusion. The prophecy has become history. The prophetic foretelling has had its gracious and glorious fulfilment. Whereas the prophet spoke in the abstract of principles, at last in the fulness of time the abstract message was wrought out into concrete history, and there came to men God's Stone, a tried Stone, an elect, a precious Stone. We know the connection between the New Testament and this message. We know how in the New Testament we read of that Stone, as He Himself spoke to men, "He that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust." The message of the prophet has become the fact of history, and there is rest for the heart of man in Him Whom God set forth to be a Propitiation for our sin, and not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world. Wherever a man is weary of sin, weary of sorrow, weary of self; wherever a man is feeling the pressure of life, and attempting to realize his manhood and failing, thank God for the Stone laid in Zion, elect and precious. You need not wait for an after-meeting. Believe as I preach. Before I get to the end of my sermon, if some tired broken man or woman will but fall on that stone, it will break him, but break to remake, and he will find God's rest, God's covering; presently, when the storms break and judgment begins,

Bold shall he stand in that great day,

For who aught to his charge shall lay?

While by His blood absolved he is

From sin's tremendous curse and shame.

But now, if we are not resting there, where are we resting? Of all other rests than that I say, "The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it." Unless we have found rest for our souls in Jesus, we have found no rest. Unless we have taken refuge in Him, we have no covering that hides us. The first half of the figure refers to a present experience. The second half of the figure refers to an experience that must come to every soul of us - the final day, the day of assize, the day of inquisition, the day of wrath. The rest is that which men are seeking now. The refuge is that which they will need when the hailstorm sweeps, and the Divine judgments are abroad. In Jesus we may have rest today, and refuge forever. Out of Him there is no rest today, and there will be no refuge in the great and awful day of God.

Let us take the first of these matters. There is no rest for any man save on that cornerstone built in Zion, and yet men seem to be resting. What do we mean by rest? In the underlying deeps of our consciousness we know that this life is not all. I am not now going to argue with the man who doubts that assertion. I pray for him, for probably no argument of mine can convince him. I speak now to the rank and file, to the great mass of human souls. We know that this life is not all. We are also profoundly conscious that whatever else we may do, we cannot stay the moving wheels of time. You may smile at my folly when I tell you that once as a boy I remember wanting an hour longer for recreation. Seeking to obtain it, I stopped the clock! God help you to see that you smile at the folly of every man who imagines he can put back or delay the turning wheels of time. They bear us onward to a consummation. If we have fear in thinking of the end, then there is something wrong in our life. If, when a man speaks of death, you object, shall I tell you why? It is because sin is unforgiven. Christian men and women in the frailty of the flesh sometimes at the end shrink from death because of its mystery. Yet they look into the face of the rider on the pale horse, and with the dignity of an assured victory they say, "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?"

"The sting of death is sin." If we do not like the preacher to speak of death, it is because sin is not dealt with in our experience. We ought to look on toward the last day. Let us honestly face it. Presently these turning wheels will bring us to the end, to the margin of life, where burdens are laid down; will bring us to the confines, crossing over which, we go out into what has been spoken of as "that bourne from which no traveler returns." In view of that day, and in view of the fact of the spiritual nature of man, how are we resting? On what have we attempted to lay down our humanity, our soul, our personality, so that we are not affrighted when we think of the close?

I talk to men individually, and I find their answers to these questions are very different. One man says, I have no fear of God, or of the end, or the future, because my life has always been a moral life. That man is making a bed for himself of his own morality.

Another man says, I have no fear of the future, because I am a Christian by all the rites and ceremonies of Christianity, by all religious observances on the part of my parents, and on my own part. That man is making a bed of external religious observance.

I find another man who says, Well, ten years ago, fifteen years ago, twenty years ago, I yielded myself to Jesus Christ, and it is all right. That man is making a bed of worn-out experience.

I come to yet another man, and he says, I have no fear; God is a God of love, and God will never punish me, or let me suffer for my sin. That man is making a bed of a false doctrine of God, utterly unwarranted by the revelation which He has made of Himself to men.

Another man puts me aside when I attempt to speak to him, saying, Oh, don't talk to me. I know these things are important, but I have no time for them yet. That man is resting his soul on the unspoken conviction that there is time yet to be, when business will not press, and pleasure will not allure, and he will have inclination to deal with the things spiritual and eternal, and with God.

These are but samples. I say to you in the presence of every one of them, and of all similar ones, first, "The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it"; and, second, "The covering is narrower than that he can wrap himself in it." In other words, none of these things brings perfect rest to the soul of man; none of these things will be sufficient to enwrap and hide him in that awful day of wrath which must break forth against all wilful disobedience and rebellion and sin.

I say, in the first place, these things do not constitute beds on which men can rest. Take the man who says that he has no fear of God and of the future, because he has been a moral man. What is morality? Morality demands a standard. What is your standard? It would be ludicrous, if it were not tragic, to hear the answers that human beings will give to that inquiry. One man says, I have always paid my way; I have never defrauded anyone, or harmed anyone. These things are advanced as though they were of the essence of morality. We see at once what is the standard of that man's morality. It is the policeman. Here is a man in the image of God, with the very stamp and likeness of Divinity on his brow; and yet he talks as though everything that the universe can ask of him, and God Almighty demand of him, is that he escape the clutch of a human policeman, and that is supposed to be morality. Morality must have a standard, and the standard of true morality must come as a revelation from Him Who is God. He has given us a standard of morality. I do not choose for the moment to find it in the words of Jesus, simple and sublime and all inclusive as they are; I go back rather to the ten words written by the finger of God long ago for the government of human life, and I ask, Does our morality bear the test of that high standard? When men consent to measure their morality by that standard, they too often begin among the things of secondary importance. What is the first word, the fundamental word of morality, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." That is morality. The man who is simply moral enough to escape imprisonment, moral enough to maintain the respect of the crowd of people that live around him, because he never harmed them, is immoral - unless his life is crowned with worship, unless he realizes the highest thing in his being as his soul goes out in love and adoration to the God of all.

And we know it. There are moments when the consciousness surges upon us. There are moments when the whispering of the other world rings through our souls, when an infinite light such as never was on land or sea flashes on our consciousness; somewhere in the silence of the night, in the loneliness of the mountain; somewhere amid the more tragic loneliness of the crowded city, God breaks in upon our souls, and we think of the infinite distances, and spaces, and eternities, and tremble! Yes, the bed is too short for us to stretch on, and our souls find no rest on any morality in which we have made our boast.

Some there are who trust in religious observances. I find persons who say, I was baptized in my infancy; I was confirmed when I came to a certain age; I have regularly attended the sacrament; therefore I am a Christian. By no means therefore. To begin with, spiritual life is never generated by material action; the life of God is not communicated by the sprinkling of water, nor could be. It is a lie, of all lies the most dastardly, that tells a child that in baptism it was made the child of God and inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. We dare not, even at the risk of uttering things that sound controversial, consent to say nothing about that lie; for thousands of souls are being deluded by it; they are led to think of themselves as Christians, and yet the Christ-life has never touched them, and they are devoid of the love of God. The warrant of my assertion is not any formulated creed, but the Scriptures of truth, the revelation of God, in which it is said to men, not, Ye must be baptized into life by water, either more or less; but, "Ye must be born again." Any man who puts his trust in any ceremony such as this finds a bed on which he cannot stretch all his manhood, and finds, therefore, no perfect and positive rest.

I have known men and women who most surely on the day of confirmation were born again. Let us consider this. What did you promise on the day of confirmation? You took upon yourself vows that others, alas in their folly, had taken upon themselves for you long ago, and never fulfilled. You say that is a drastic statement. I challenge you to find me any godparent who ever fulfilled his vows. It cannot be done. I cannot do it for my own children, let alone the children of other people. But there came a day when you took these vows. What did you promise? You promised three things, in what you believed to be the presence of God's minister: you promised to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil. Did you mean it? Did you do it? If so, that was repentance; and if in the doing of it, you yielded to Christ, then and there you were born again. But did you do it? Did you renounce the world? Did you renounce the flesh? Did you renounce the devil? If not, your bed is too short to stretch on. You cannot rest on a broken vow, can you? Instead of renouncing the flesh you have pampered and ministered to its constant, clamant cry. Instead of renouncing the devil, you have allowed the devil to lead you and drive you at his will. And yet you are a Christian, forsooth! No, a thousand times no! "For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it." In the honest integrity of conviction, you know that on such a bed there is no rest; on such a false assumption there is no place for the soul's security.

But someone else will say, Ten years ago - fifteen, twenty - I gave myself to Christ, and I am all right. By no means necessarily so. The fact that Jesus saved me yesterday is in itself no use now. Unless I am able to link on to my past tense a present tense, then woe is me, for I am undone. The great apostle, writing his own biography in rapid sentences in the Philippian epistle, said, "… I count all things but loss …" That is what happened on the way to Damascus. Suppose that, having counted all things but dross, he had gone back and picked them up again and said they were precious; suppose sin had triumphed because he had gone back to the world and forsaken the things of Christ; suppose he had turned his back on the Christ and crucified Him afresh, and had counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and done despite unto the spirit of grace, what then? Then, I tell you, his cleansing long years before would have been of no avail. But in that great chapter he said something else. "Yea, verily, and I count all things but loss …" The past is the present also. The attitude taken up long ago is maintained today. Jesus saved me on the Damascene road; Jesus saves me now.

I am afraid the Church of Jesus Christ is full of men and women who are living on a past experience; and they sing at rare or regular intervals, as their choice may be:

Where is the blessedness I had

When first I found the Lord?

Men and women sing that as though it were a sign of saintship. It is a sign that they have lost their saintship. The blessedness I had when first I found the Lord is with me yet; but it is greater, mightier, and flows as a river instead of a rivulet. That should be the language of the soul. The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it. There is no rest in a past profession that is not merged into a perpetual possession.

Once again. Here is the man who tells me that he is trusting God, that he is casting himself on God, that God is too good to punish him. Oh, man, God is too good to let you go unpunished! There are men who if they passed into heaven as they are would turn it into hell. God writes on the portal of His home, "There shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie." God is so good that He will not let anything that works abomination into His dwelling-place and home. If we will not accept the conditions of His heaven, in love to heaven, in love to truth, in love to the well-being of multitudes, He must shut us out, He must visit on us the vials of His wrath, the punishment we have positively and deliberately chosen.

If you can persuade me that God will allow a man to sin until character becomes sin, and then let him, the impure, into the land of light, then you will persuade me that God is unkind with an unkindness that is tragic and awful. His wrath flames in the passion of His love. The punishment that He visits on the sinner is the necessary outcome of the infinite compassion of His heart. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Let me turn to the last illustration I used. A man tells me that there is time enough yet, that he has no time yet, that he is postponing these things to a more convenient season, that business presses and pleasures allure, but that some day, in a little while, he will attend to his religion. Oh, how often the messengers of the Cross have had to speak of the fatuous folly of this position. Long before the Christian light had fallen on men, the philosopher said to his students, "Gentlemen, the supreme thing is that we be ready to die." One of their number said, "That is true, and I propose to be ready." Asked the teacher, "When do you propose to prepare?" "Just before I die," came the flippant answer. Then the old man said, "And now, sir, have you fixed the date of your dying? Do you know when it will be? Seeing that you may die within a moment, this is the time to prepare for dying."

I grant you that the soul cast on God in the last extremity is mercifully saved for Jesus' sake; but when is the hour of your last extremity? Moreover, how do you know that when the passing comes, all the intellect will not have lost its power to think? God's time is the perpetual Now! Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation! There is not a man really at rest who is postponing the decision of infinite and eternal and important things. The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it.

Let us remember that the thing on which we are trying to rest we shall need as a refuge in the day that is coming. How will our morality hide us from the searching eyes of Him Who judges, not the external action, but the internal character? How will our religious observance cover us if it have not produced in us religious life? Will a profession of the long ago hide us from the eyes of Him if it have not continued, and if our life have not harmonized with it in all its process? How will our affirmation of the love of God stand us as refuge when, in love, to save others from the contamination of our pollution, He hurls us into the darkling void? How will our excuse as to time avail us when He will remind us that the one supreme and first business of life is the adjustment of the soul to Himself?

But thank God for the message of the prophet, who, ere he satirized the men who thought they had made an agreement with death, uttered these words: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." He who rests there shall have no restlessness. He who takes refuge there shall know nothing of the fitful fever of the man who attempts to wrap himself in a narrow covering. That resting place is long enough, and broad enough, and strong enough, to rest the weary soul and give it perfect peace.

Bold shall I stand in that great day

if I am arrayed in the robe that He brings to me, that righteousness of which Paul writes, which has been set forth as at the disposal of men by faith and unto faith.

Turn from your false rest, and come to the true; and you will find in God all that your soul is needing now, and all that it will need in the last unutterable day.