**VOLUME 10; CHAPTER 06 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**OUR HOPE AND INHERITANCE by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.*

*1 Peter 1:3-5*

THIS A GREAT DOXOLOGY. IT IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWS SALUTATION, and merges into consolation. This method of introduction is the more remarkable when we consider the condition of those to whom the letter was addressed. Peter, faithful to the compact he had made with Paul to devote himself to the circumcision, was writing to Jewish Christians in Asia Minor Who were then passing through a time of "fiery trial." They were charged with being "evil-doers," enemies of the State. Their very name, "Christian," brought them persecution and oppression. Writing thus to these his brethren - his brethren after the flesh, and his brethren in the Lord Jesus Christ, writing to them to establish them, as his Master had commanded he should do when once he himself was turned back again - he began his letter with a vibrant note of praise and doxology. It is hardly the usual method. It is hardly the method that we should adopt ourselves. When we write to someone in fiery trial, misunderstood, oppressed, persecuted, we do not often begin with Hallelujah! But that is what this man did. His sentences are positively vibrant with joy.

The doxology consists of a celebration of life, the life from which it springs. What was the reason of the doxology? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who … begat us." The life so begotten was the inspiration of the song, and the song celebrates that life out of which it springs.

Observe the movements of the doxology. God is praised, is worshiped - for that is the significance of the word, "Blessed be God." It is the language of a soul prostrate before Him, not in fear, but in courage; not in despair, but in hope; not in cowardice, but in high and holy confidence. It is praise for life, for life as the outcome of the mercy of God by the way of the resurrection, "Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," and for life having a twofold value - "unto a living hope," "unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Thus we may say that the exultation of the singer centers in the abounding mercy of God, celebrates the resurrection of Jesus as the medium through which this mercy of God flows out toward men, and confesses the twofold benefit resulting from the outflow of that mercy by way of the resurrection.

Our theme tonight, selected from the many themes which the great passage suggests, is the relation of the resurrection to mercy and life. I propose two lines of thought only: first, what the resurrection of Jesus Christ meant to God; and second, what the resurrection means to us.

What the resurrection meant to God we will first state, and then attempt to consider. The suggestion is somewhat startling, that the resurrection in itself could mean anything to God. Yet, if one thing is most clearly revealed in this passage, and, indeed, in all the New Testament writing, it is that God had great gain by way of the resurrection, that the resurrection made possible in the activity of God that which apart from it had not been possible. We here view the outworking in time and into visibility of the profound fact by which God was enabled to do, what apart from this fact He could not have done. Take Peter's words once again, leaving out the subsidiary clauses: "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... according to His great mercy begat us again … by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The declaration of the apostle is that by the resurrection God created the possibility for the outflow of His great mercy in the gift of life to needy souls.

This assumes, first, the fact of the mercy of God. That mercy was not created by the resurrection. The resurrection a channel through which it could flow. It also assumes the restraint of the mercy of God. It could not move; it could not act according to its own desire. By that of which the resorrection was the symbol in time all the barriers were broken down; and the eternal fact of the mercy of God found restraint ended, and the consequent possibility of outflow toward the sons of men.

What is mercy? Our word is a rich and beautiful one; but in order that we may make no mistake, in order that our interpretation may be neither too narrow nor broader than is warranted, let us see what the word really means, which here is so translated. It is a primitive word whose history is unknown. It always had one particular significance, being always used in reference to compassion in activity. There may be compassion which never becomes active, which is always passive, the nursed sorrow of the heart; but that is not mercy. Mercy is compassion struggling and determined to reach out, and become active. The root significance of the word translated mercy in the Old Testament is apparently at the first a very simple, insignificant one; it means to bend, to stoop, to bow. Mercy is compassion bending, stooping, bowing.

Mercy, then, presupposes a state of need in those toward whom it moves, or over whom it stoops. Herein we distinguish between love and mercy, between grace and mercy, between compassion and mercy. I grant that apart from love, grace, or compassion there can be no mercy; but there may be love and grace, and even compassion, without mercy. Love does not necessarily connote sorrow or suffering in the case of the one on whom it is set; but mercy does. Love becomes mercy in the presence of the suffering and sorrow of the soul on whom it is set. Without love, there is no mercy; but whenever we employ this great word "mercy" we are conscious of a shadow over the brightness, there is a sigh and a sob, the sigh and sob of need; and mercy is that effort of love to go out to the needy one and lift and heal and bless. The mercy of God, then, is God's desire to heal and help, to deliver and save those who are wounded and in need, who are bound and in the place of destruction.

The apostle writes of the "much mercy of God." Here is a case in which all grammar is defeated. When I went to school I learned, positive, much; comparative, more; superlative, most. Which is really the greatest of these three? The superlative? By no means. The superlative is only the ultimate in comparison. The positive is the greatest, for when left alone it admits of no comparison. We may speak of the most merciful God when we are thinking of someone else; we think of God as being most merciful when we think of ourselves. When we think of any quality of God comparison is impossible. There is nothing with which to compare it. In that phrase "the much mercy of God," so easily passed over, the apostle has brought us face to face with the fact that God suffered; and suppose - a supposition which is entirely unwarranted, but in which I will indulge for the sake of argument - suppose God had found no way of saving men, He still would have mercy, compassion reaching out toward need. "The much mercy of God." None is unreached by that mercy, so far as it is desire on the part of God to save. If you rather question that statement I will enforce it by another Biblical quotation, God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

But there is a sense in which that "much mercy of God" must be, and is, held in restraint; there is some reason why it cannot flow out to men, some reason why it cannot act on behalf of those who are in need. This reason consists in the impossibility of conferring benefits on those who are in sin, that is, who are in rebellion against holiness, and under the mastery of evil. God cannot give the gifts of His love to souls who are under the mastery of sin. This restraint is not the operation of justice as opposed to mercy; it is the operation of mercy itself, and of mercy in the interest of its own object. To bestow benefits on such people would be to defeat the intention of mercy. An angel is seen with a flaming sword the gate of Eden guarding the way. Why? "To keep the way of the tree of life," lest man should eat of the tree of life and live forever. You say, That is judgment! No, it is mercy! To confer the gift of life on a man who has sinned would be to perpetuate his sin, and his pollution, and his paralysis; and his agony. Guard the way to the tree of life, and guard it by flaming sword; and that flaming sword is mercy delivering men from the unutterable penalty of continuity in the condition into which they have brought themselves as the result of their own sin. Mercy is not weakness, not sentiment, not mawkish sympathy. Mercy will never try to deal with sin by the application of rose water! The old Hebrew singer understood this:

He smote Egypt in their first-born;

For His mercy endureth forever.

He smote great kings;

For His mercy endureth forever.

And slew famous kings;

For His mercy endureth forever.

Sihon, king of the Amorites;

For His mercy endureth forever.

And Og, king of Bashan;

For His mercy endureth forever.

The mercy, the going out of God in desire to heal, cannot confer blessings on men in sin. The gates of the city of God which the Seer of Patmos beheld were of pearl, every several gate was of one pearl; and the infinite significance of the pearl is its purity. The flashing splendor of the gates of the city of God forever says, Nought that defileth can ever enter here! Why? Because if that which defileth be permitted to enter into the city of God, then the very city of God is insecure, and the very conditions which mercy seeks to establish are denied and made impossible. By reason of the profundity of the Divine mercy, by reason of its intensity, of its marvelous greatness, it can make no truce with sin. The much mercy of God is, therefore, held in restraint.

Listen, then, to the doxology: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus." What, then, was the resurrection of Jesus? First, the resurrection of Jesus was the necessary, inevitable sequence and culmination of the Cross of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus was the perfecting of that which took place in the mystery of His passion, of that passion wherein sin was dealt with in a way so profound that we have never been able to understand it perfectly, but in a way so Divine that two millenniums have rejoiced in the experience of it. The resurrection was not something separated from the Cross, or in opposition to the Cross; it was part of the Cross, the completion of it, the last movement in it. To that conception of it all the references of the Lord Himself give witness. Whenever He spoke of His Cross, the last thing He said was about resurrection. We cannot find a single occasion on which Jesus spoke of His Cross but that He ended by speaking of His resurrection. The evangelist tells us that when Jesus and Elijah and Moses met on the mount they "spake of the exodus which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." That is more than the Cross; it is the Cross and the resurrection. When Luke tells the story of Jesus going to the Cross, His determination to journey to Jerusalem to die, he does not say Jesus is going to die, he says, "When the days were well-nigh come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." Jerusalem was an incident by the way, the Cross was part of the journey, the resurrection was its completion. In that hour of resurrection, therefore, we come to the culmination of the Cross, and so to the ending of sin, the breaking of its power, the canceling of its obligation, the quenching of its fires, the disannulling of its bonds, the devitalizing of its poison. When that is done, the abounding mercy of God can move out toward suffering and needy humanity.

The second thing has been involved in the first. The resurrection was the initiation of a new and living way. The resurrection was that which, resulting from the Cross, meant that the life taken from the dead, having been voluntarily laid down therein, was now at the disposal of others. Christian life is Christ's life, communicated, shared, and mastering our own lives. That is the new and living way open for men, made possible for men. Mercy can operate, indeed operates in this very activity, and brings men into the new and living way. The sinner is cleansed from that with which God can make no terms, and energized for that which God demands in His holiness because He is a God of love. The sinner is lifted from the depths, loved out of the pit of corruption, and saved, in the full and gracious sense of the word. The resurrection stands in human history for our eyes to look back at its light and glory, and know that through it, that is through all those infinite and spiritual mysteries and wonders of which it was the outward symbol, God has gained a way by which His great mercy may flow out for the help of such as are in need.

What the resurrection, therefore, means to us is revealed in the doxology by two co-ordinate clauses, each one beginning with the word "unto," one before the declaration as to begetting, and the other after it: "Unto a living hope … unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you."

"A living hope" is a hope that is alive, that is not mortal, perishable. Hope always deals with things unseen, with things which are not demonstrable to the senses. What a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? We are saved by that hope. What, then, is hope? What I have said about hope I might surely say about faith. Indeed, it is difficult to keep the two things apart. Yet there is a difference. Hope is a greater word than faith. Faith does not always involve hope. In the first place, God has conditioned our salvation on faith. Hope is not always involved in faith. When faith operates simply it grows into hope. Faith is always involved in hope. Hope is therefore to me the greater word. Hope is the element of joyful expectation in faith. A man can have faith by a strenuous effort of the will. When faith has a song at the center of it, a song of assurance, then it becomes hope. Our word is a beautiful one, coming from the Anglo-Saxon *hopa*, which meant not merely anticipation of something ahead, but the effort of the life to reach it.

In what sense has the resurrection given us a living hope? Hope, as we have said, deals with unseen things which cannot be proved by the senses, not being demonstrable to the senses. Let me name two such. The resurrection of Jesus is a new interpretation of personality, such as the world had never had before, such as the world has never had, apart from the resurrection, and the works which our Lord Himself did work. Do not be foolish enough to try to get rid of the last two chapters in John's gospel. They are absolutely necessary to the interpretation of the gospel. Do not try to get rid of the post-resurrection stories. You need them. Think of them as a whole. What do you see? Jesus the same, and yet different. Human personality is revealed as superior to physical death. He died, but is alive. By that sign and token our heart is sure that the last word has not been said about personality when over the sacred dust we repeat the words, dust to dust, earth to earth, ashes to ashes. We are referring then to the transient abode of personality, but not to personality. We know, moreover, that personality means continuity of essential individuality. It was the same Jesus they had known before Whom they knew after. Shall we know our loved ones in heaven? Surely, absolutely yes. There is no question about it. That is what these post-resurrection stories show. He was the same, the same Jesus. Yes, but there is more in this new interpretation of personality. I see in the risen Jesus change, and enlargement of capacity and potentiality, even within the realm of that of which, for lack of a better term, I speak as the material. In the resurrection the body of Jesus was raised; it was such a body that He was able to light a fire on the shore and prepare breakfast for tired fishermen who had been out all night, such a body that He was able to sit down with them in the upper room and eat of broiled fish, yet so different a body that He was there in their midst without the shooting of a bolt or the opening of a door, so different that for a long way along the road to Emmaus He could walk with two of them who knew Him well without allowing them to discover Him. So much the same that when He so chose, they saw and knew that it was the Lord. Are these stories speculations? No, they are revelations; your philosophy cannot explain them, no human philosophy can; but God has given us this one picture of personality beyond the grave for the cheer and courage of our souls. The grave does not end everything. Beyond it we continue the same, yet with a personality so changed, enlarged, and beautified, that as they read the story men are inclined to doubt. I do not wonder. Do not treat these stories as though they were in any sense small. Some man says: Do you really think that someone came into that room without anyone opening the door? Do you really believe that? I reply: Would not you like to be able to do it? I think you would. I think you often sigh within the confines of this material body. I know there have been moments when I would have given anything, not to be out of the body, but to be suddenly present where I could not come by traveling. That is only a rough and almost brutal suggestion. We have no definite, detailed revelation; but here are great whispers, wonderful whispers, giving us gleams of personality beyond the tomb. I think Jesus tarried those forty days with bereaved souls in order that straining, tear-bedewed eyes might know that the life on the other side is the same, only ennobled, glorified, beautified.

The resurrection is also for us the pledge of our redemption. The death of Jesus was vicarious. He died for others. The resurrection of Jesus was vicarious. He rose for others. Men die in Him and live in Him. This is the great value for time with its vicissitudes, for earth with its limitations. We are born again unto this living hope.

The text, then, takes us across the line, and suggests to us the things that lie beyond. "An inheritance." That means a place and possession in the heavens, interpreted, as I have said, by the risen One, and guaranteed by the ascension of that risen One. Let us pause ere we call in question the accuracy of the declaration that this Man ascended as Man, and that this Man, as Man, sat down at the right hand of God. If you deny me that, then I am not sure about myself and the future. While that remains to me as a truth in the power of which I live day by day I have hope indeed. At the right hand of God - the mystic phrase suggests a definite location - is Jesus of Nazareth even now, not limited in His Deity by His location, but located in His humanity, while by the Spirit His Deity is with us everywhere. In that ascension of the Son of Man I have man's guarantee of place and possession in the life that lies beyond this: where He is we shall be also.

That inheritance is reserved by the power of God. Reserved, what does the word mean? Withheld! That does not sound quite so pleasing. It means something else. Secured! The infant in the eye of the law to the age of twenty-one does not enter into his inheritance and patrimony, but it is reserved for him. Withheld from him in the days of infancy, it is secured to him at the period of his manhood. So the ultimate in our life in Jesus Christ is withheld from us for the present; but it is secured to us; it is reserved for us. "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."

The experience is reserved for those who are kept. The picture here is that of the power of God on sentry duty, the power of God watching over us and guarding us, keeping us for the inheritance which is withheld from us, but secured to us in Jesus Christ. Kept by the power of God through faith, that is through faith operating in that power, trusting it, and obeying it.

The apostle employs language full of poetry as he gives us the characteristics of the inheritance, "incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." There is something of the poetry lost in the translation. As he wrote it, there is a beauty and dignity which we miss in the translation. Our inheritance is unwithering, unsullied, unfading! Unwithering - that speaks of its deathlessness, nothing is in it of the element of destruction; it cannot die; that is eternal life. Unsullied - that speaks of its sinlessness, nothing is in it that prevents the perpetual development of the Divine life; it is perfect in purity. Unfading - nothing is in it that dims the glory or tarnishes the beauty; it is fadeless.

Lift your eyes, ye sons of night; for ye are also sons of light! On beyond the gloom is the gleam of the glory! Beyond the fiery trial is the day of emancipation! A larger and more stupendous life lies beyond!

For today amid the strife we have a living hope. An inheritance is reserved for us in the undying ages and limitless spaces of eternity. To these things He begat us when His abundant mercy was enabled to flow forth through the resurrection of His Son.

The theme is a very pertinent one for today. I have found it so in meditating on it. This is a time of fiery trial to Christian souls. So far we are preserved from physical suffering; but these our sons are enduring, and we also with them. Our spiritual and mental stress is great. We need some great comfort of God today. Moreover, I think there is another line of similarity. It seems to me that it is even so that prophets of Christianity are in danger of being called enemies of the State today. There is a subtle peril abroad of supposing that Christianity should be postponed to some more convenient season. I hold no brief for Dr. Lyttelton. I have not read his sermon; but from what I gather from the criticisms of it I agree with him almost entirely. I think that very probably he was unwise in some of his illustrations; but if Christianity is not to be proclaimed in the Spirit of Christ today God have mercy on the Church and the nation. We are in dire peril lest we be afraid to say the great things of our faith because we shall be supposed to be enemies of the State. It is also certainly so that in some quarters the very term "Christian" is suspect. We need comfort, we need help. Where shall we find it?

This Easter day has come to us in the midst of fiery trial, misunderstanding, difficulty, perplexity, and agony. If Easter day does nothing else, it should bring to us the capacity for singing a great doxology. Mercy is the inspiration of judgment. While God's judgments are abroad in the earth men are learning righteousness, and that is the purpose of mercy. God will, and does, remember mercy in the midst of wrath. lt is the reason why His judgments are operative. Our hope today is still living. No slaying can destroy it. No grave can hold it. Our inheritance is still reserved, and through death, defilement, and decay, we move ever onward toward the unwithering, the unsullied, the unfading. We look, as Peter said in another of his letters, not alone for the things that lie beyond, we look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

We march listening to the music of the reserved inheritance; we march in the energy of the living hope, to both of which we have been born anew in the much mercy of God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead.