**VOLUME 10; CHAPTER 12 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE OPPORTUNITY OF CALAMITY by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*

*Ephesians 5:16*

IN THESE WORDS WE HAVE A REMARKABLE REVELATION OF Christian privilege and responsibility in days of calamity. In the text are outstanding words which arrest our attention: first, the opening word, "Redeeming"; then the word almost immediately succeeding, "time"; and, finally, the word used to describe the days, "evil." The word here rendered "redeeming" literally means to buy out or to buy. The base of the word is the market place. The word itself suggests keen business acumen, the ability to know exactly what to buy, and when to buy. It is a strictly commercial term.

The second word, "time," has a particular significance. It indicates a special occasion, and therefore a special opportunity.

The third word, "evil," refers to evil in the effect it produces: evil is that which is hurtful, harmful, calamitous.

From this examination of words we immediately discover that in the thought of the apostle evil days constitute special occasions or opportunities for the prosecution of the commerce of the Kingdom of God, that such evil days can be bought out, bought up, turned to account; and, finally, that if they are to be rescued from their evil nature or from that which is calamitous, if they are to be turned to account in the interest of beneficence and goodness, they must be bought up, they must be purchased. The element of sacrifice is involved, the giving up of something, in order that the opportunity may be seized. Of course, involved in that is the larger thought that all such giving results in getting. As in the market place in the olden days, as in the market place today, the man, keen and shrewd and honest and upright and true, is ever prepared to give, but he expects also to gain.

The whole conception of the apostle, then, is that to certain people days of calamity offer special opportunities for the prosecution of great enterprises of the Kingdom of God.

Let us first notice the thought of the apostle concerning the days, "evil days." It was a revolutionary idea. If we had found our way into Ephesus, one of the cities certainly to which this letter was sent, and had talked to the men of Ephesus, the men in authority, if we had told them that someone had said that these were evil days, they would have laughed at us. They were very prosperous days in Ephesus, the days of her wealth, the days when the Temple of Artemis was also the banking house of the merchants, the days of that strange relationship between commerce and religion that made Ephesus materially great. We shall understand the apostle only as we remember the people to whom he was writing. When I glance at the opening of the letter I find this description of them:

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, to the saints

which are in Ephesus, and the faithful in Christ Jesus."

He was writing, then, to those whom he described as saints, those set apart to God in Christ, separated to God for the specific purpose, not of saving their own souls, but of carrying out God's enterprises. When Paul described them as "the faithful in Christ Jesus," the word does not suggest they were always faithful in the sense of fidelity, but that they lived on the principle of faith. These people to whom the wrote then judged things not by the seen but by the unseen; these were people who saw not merely the things that were seen, but all those vast things of the spiritual world and of eternal measurements in which all near things were conditioned; they were people who lived on the principle of faith. Writing to such Paul said, the days are calamitous.

In the chapter from which this text is taken we have a yet further description of these people: "Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love." In that injunction we have a revelation, not merely of what these people were in themselves, but of their supreme responsibility. They were to imitate God; they were to behave as God would behave in Ephesus; they were to live according to the standard of Divine love in Ephesus. Love was to be the master passion of all their thinking, all their speaking, and all their doing. It must be the love of God, not a mere weak, sentimental anemic emotion, evanescent and passing, but love, that high outgoing of the soul that acts as surely in judgment as in mercy, that is based forevermore on truth and is always suffused with light.

To such people these days in Ephesus were evil days, and wherever that ideal of life Paul gives the Ephesians is accepted and followed the days are evil days. This world is not a friend of Jesus Christ. It may speak respectfully of Him, it may even patronize some of His teaching, but it is not a friend of Jesus Christ. In proportion as men are truly trying to live and love like God, on the principle of faith, the days are always evil days. Take any ordinary day. I do not mean the days of the moment in which we are living, but those days before we were plunged into the catastrophe of the hour. The ideal of life among the mass of men in the city or in the country is godless. Men are living without relationship to the claims of God - rather, I should say, without recognition of that relationship. The bulk of human activity is material, even our own activity. It is so of necessity. I am not saying this is wrong. The majority of our hours are necessarily given to things that are material, transient, perishing, the things that presently we shall drop and leave. The rush and speed of life today are against man's development and the character of love. The hurry and the jostle and the crush of life do not help the development of Christian character. There is a sense, I say, in which all the days in which we are called on to live are evil days if the ideal of life be that described by the apostle, and if its master passion be that of living as God would live, and walking forevermore in love. To the majority of saints the general atmosphere of the ordinary days is against Christian character, and not helpful. When that is declared on a Sabbath morning in the sanctuary by a preacher of the truth men are almost surprised to hear it. Yet it is the thing they are constantly saying in the subconsciousness of their inner life.

I think that we shall all agree that these are evil days, days of calamity. The things that hurt and harm and spoil and destroy seem rampant everywhere. The Christian man must be conscious that this whole war (World War 1) is in itself evil, that it is calamitous. Christian men cannot rejoice in war for war's sake. We may be divided in our opinion on this particular war, on the relationship of our own nation to it; but as Christians we must agree that war itself is calamitous. It can be none other than a calamity. This ghastly destruction of human life is dire calamity. And Dr. Saleeby is perfectly right, even though some people label him today as fanatical, when he persistently reminds us that we must think of the long cost of the war. That is not the cost of money but of men, and not of men alone, but of the impoverishment of the generations ahead. Surely there is no man in this country who can rejoice in war for the sake of war. They are evil days for the world.

I go further now, and here is the great burden on my heart, inspiring the message I would deliver. At the present moment the days seem to be almost more evil to us as a nation and people than any that have preceded in the war. Let me hasten to explain that, so as to leave no misunderstanding of what I am thinking. We are all conscious that there is abroad just now a spirit, shall I say, of pessimism. I confess I have been burdened and oppressed during the last week with reading papers, religious and secular. I also confess that there is some ground for the present attitude, that this particular hour is a very serious one, from the beginning of August last until now. I do not propose for a single moment to speak as one having any knowledge which is not available to the everyday reader, but as one who has been attempting to follow the whole movement, reading the writings of such men as Mr. Hilaire Belloc, Mr. Garvin, Mr. Spender, and Sir William Robertson Nicol, and I declare that I do not consider the hour at which we have now arrived is any darker than any hour through which we have passed since August 4 last. That is a personal opinion, which you may dismiss. What I do think is happening - and I think it is a great gain - is that we are beginning to understand how serious and terrific is the task before us. What I am trying to do now is to face the fact that the days are evil days. What then? What, then, is to be the attitude of the man of faith? How are we to look on these days? And what is our duty in this particular hour?

Now, for the moment leaving all this reference to the present situation, I go back to the text. Having then in mind the apostolic description of those days and those saints at Ephesus, I ask you to notice that the whole meaning of this text is that evil days constitute peculiar opportunities for the prosecution of the enterprises of the Kingdom of God. Let me touch on the things I used a moment ago as illustrations. Every godless man is an opportunity for godly men. Godless men come into contact with godly men in the economy of grace in order that they may pass under the influence of their godliness. Immediately there breaks on us the conviction of the wrong we have done if in the company of godless men we have consented to lower the standard of our own godliness in thought and speech.

I am not suggesting that a man of business is to ask every man who comes into his office if he is a Christian. That is not my suggestion. I am not suggesting that a man on his professional duties shall offer tracts to men. That is not my suggestion. If I were a business man and you talked to me about my soul when I am doing business with you, I should show you the door immediately. A tract enclosed with an invoice is an insult to religion. When a godly man does business with a godless man he must see to it that his business is done in a godly fashion. The godly fashion is not merely the fashion of the man who is strictly just; it is also the fashion of the man who is walking in love. The godly fashion of doing business is not merely the fashion of the man who will refuse to misrepresent his goods. The godly fashion is the fashion of the man who will not allow the other man to sell him something for less than its value in order that he may get the advantage. Oh! you say, I had a great bargain this week. Did you? What was it? I bought a picture and the man did not know its value, but I did. That is not godliness; it is godlessness. Godliness in business means more than integrity and uprightness of purpose. The actually godly man will see that the other man is not wronged or harmed. Every godless man is an opportunity for our godliness to shine forth. All material things - I have said that the majority of days are filled with material activities - all material things are a basis for our spirituality to shine on, the carbon on which the electric current of our relationship with God must flash out. The very things that make it hard to be a Christian are the things which enable us to shine, are opportunities to display the meaning of Christianity and the value of our relationship to God. It is a day of rush and jostle and hurry, when it is hard to be quiet, and calm, and tender, and merciful. The rush today is our chance to reveal the quietness of God.

I go back again to the thing that is on all our hearts. These are dark days, serious days. May I remind you, then, children of God, sons of the Most High, faithful in Christ Jesus, those who are called to be imitators of God and to walk in love, that panic today is the result of the over-whelming sense of the might of brute force. Courage demonstrates confidence in God. Courage is never foolhardiness. Courage will take every precaution. But courage will never sit down and utter its dirge in the hour of darkness. I find men today looking out over the present situation, and suggesting that the ultimate issue of the struggle, however long and however ghastly, may be the defeat of righteousness and truth and justice and honor and compassion. The men who make such a suggestion must, for the moment, be over-whelmed with the force of brutality, and have lost their vision of God. I declare here publicly this morning, with great solemnity, that if the forces that trample order under foot, and violate the common things of humanity should triumph, then in the day of their triumph my preaching would cease in despairing silence, for my faith in God would be utterly broken. The thing is impossible. The thing can never be. We must take the large outlook. We must remember that even in this hour we also are suffering by reason of our sins. These things of suffering are disciplinary. I look toward the issue, and I cannot bate one jot of heart or hope. I must move right forward and believe that God Who acts in truth and love and mercy must prevail. The true attitude for the man of faith today is that attitude of courage which demonstrates confidence in God.

It may be said that perhaps these things need saying to those who are writing in the papers, but not to Christian men and women. I do not agree. The thing of importance is how Christian men and women talk after they have read. By ordinary conversation, in homes, and stores, and clubs throughout the length and breadth of this land today, more is done to influence opinion than is done by all the writers in the press. Therefore it may be well to remind ourselves of so simple a matter as this, that when we read articles in the press, in magazines, daily papers, weekly papers, we should attempt to find out the temperament of the men who write them. When we do that we discover the reason for a good deal of foolish optimism and pernicious pessimism.

There is, however, a common bond uniting these men who are interpreting the hour, and that is the passion for the success of truth and justice and right. When we have listened to them and taken their outlook, let us remit everything to the Biblical revelation that good shall be established. If we waver it is because our confidence in God is not the confidence that it ought to be. "Strengthen ye the weak hands, und confirm the feeble knees" - that seems to me to be a message we supremely need to hear at this particular time.

I go back to one of the least known books of the Old Testament, the Song of Solomon, that wonderful, mystical love song, purely Eastern in its gorgeous coloring and in all its speech. In the course of it I find these words, and I resolutely adopt the old Puritan method of making use of them as illustration of the highest relationship between Christ and His people: "As the lily among the thorns, so is my love among the daughters." That is the bridegroom's description of His Bride, Christ's description of His Church: "As the lily among the thorns." The lily is of gorgeous beauty, of light and splendor, of loveliness; the thorns are rank and dank and poisonous. Yet the lily grows among the thorns in the soil in which the thorns are reared. The lily is fanned by the breezes that blow on the thorns; on the lily falls the rain that falls on the thorns. The difference is the difference between the nature of the lily and the nature of the thorns.

All about us are the things that are against us, evil days, days of darkness; and men's hearts are failing them because of fear. Evil might is attempting to master a world of love by putting it under the heel of cruelty. The lily is to grow in that soil, and in that atmosphere, full of beauty, full of grace, full of courage, full of confidence, full of assurance. Christian people are not to be aloof from the age in which they live. They are not to separate themselves from the endeavors of others. In order to win victory in this struggle. we must unite. We must not be guilty of abating hope, of sitting down in ashes, of suggesting that at last that which began best is going to end worst. We are to demonstrate our belief by our courage, by our certainty, by our hope.

Through the fulfilment of this obligation in the midst of such opportunities the enterprises of God will be carried forward, men will be won for Him, and the victory will be on His side. Men are rallying to the flag from the north and the south, and the east and the west, from all the lands within this great Empire. But something more than material force is needed. There must be intercession, the activity in the secret place, if there is to be spiritual courage. These are the things needed today as never before, and these are the contributions which we can supremely make in this hour of our calamity and our need.

Never must the men of faith allow themselves to be confined in their looking to the horizon that appears. There was a man of old time who endured as seeing Him Who is invisible. And this is the question I think we need to ask ourselves today. Do we see God? You remember the story from the classics, how, when news was sent to Antigonus that an army as of ten to one was mustered against him, he looked at the messenger and said: "And for how many do you count me?" I lift the lesson into this higher realm. We are told of the enemy that they have more men, more munitions, more strength, more preparation. I affirm, then, that the question God is asking of the men of faith is this: For how many do you count Me?

Ah, yes, but we must see to it that we are on His side. We must see to it, in all our praying and our thinking and our enduring and our sacrificing, that we seek, first, right, truth, justice, mercy, compassion, and that these be the main motives of our endeavor. Then may we calmly wait amidst the furnace blast, knowing what the issue must be. The measure of our investment is the measure of the return that will reward us presently. The measure in which today we are putting into the awful business of the hour all the forces of our life, temporal, mental, spiritual, is the measure of the victory that will come to us presently.

One glance at the context in conclusion. The true attitude for heavenly commerce is a threefold one, and the apostle has carefully marked it for us. "Look therefore carefully "; "understanding how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise what the will of the Lord is." "Be filled with the Spirit." If the saints of God, the faithful in Christ Jesus, who are to imitate God and walk in love, are indeed to buy up the opportunity of the dark and evil day these things must not be neglected. Their walk must be with care, with caution. Let us be very careful now to put a guard on our lips, and in the matter and the method of our everyday conversation let us walk circumspectly. Let there be a great silence when silence is better, quiet speech when speech is called for. The Christian man who runs round his place of business and among his friends wailing over the apparent neglect of the Government, or of this general, or of that admiral, ought to be imprisoned till the war is over. Lift up the hands that hang down, confirm the feeble knees; your God will come with a recompense!

The true attitude must also be that of the shrewdness that understands the will of the Lord. In the midst of our waiting there must be the patience that recognizes the necessity for discipline. There must be no forgetfulness of that past which was characterized by forgetfulness of God. I am driven to declare to you that as I climb the heights and look out on this England of ours, this land so honored and dear to our hearts, I feel it is better this than that we should have drifted still further away into our luxury, and our ease, and our trivialities, and our indulgences. Better this, for out of it all is coming a great sense of the vastness of life, and of the reality of God. Men are discovering that the only resting-place for the heart is the belief that over the battle and the slaughter, over the waiting and the weariness God presides, and that out of it all at last shall come the new era, cleaner, purer, better.

Here also are words which, of course, have a much wider application: Be filled with the Spirit. It is true, however, that in proportion as Christian men and women today are filled with the Spirit of God, they will co-operate with Him in this hour of calamity, and the evil day will be bought up in the interest of God's Kingdom.

This is what we need to do today in order to serve our nation: to walk circumspectly as those that know the will of the Lord, and that in that fulness of the Spirit that enables us each in his place or her place, in public work, in Parliament, in the home, about our professional duty, not to be pessimistic, nor optimistic with the optimism that is foolhardy, but strong and courageous with the courage that is built on our confidence in God. So today may we redeem the time, because the days are evil.